

# Asylum interviewers' and interpreters' approaches to rapport building in asylum interviewing: A Thematic Analysis

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*Psychology at the Frontiers: Asylum Interviewing and Decision Making [Psych-AID]*

# Background and introduction

- Rapport building in investigative interviews has been found to improve interview quality in terms of increased number of details
- These findings are reflected in various guidelines and recommendations regarding investigative interviewing
- Definitions of rapport vary considerably within the investigative interviewing literature (Neequaye & Mac Giolla, 2022)
  - What do practitioners within asylum interviewing think of rapport building?



# Asylum interviewing vs. other investigative interviews

- Cross cultural setting
  - Many typical rapport behaviors might work differently in cross cultural settings
- Usually interpreter-mediated interviews
  - Previous research on police interviewers' perceptions suggest use of interpreters makes rapport building more challenging
  - What are interpreters' own views and approaches to rapport building?
  - Could interpreters even aid in rapport building in cross-cultural settings?



# Study 1 - Sample

- Based on answers from asylum interviewers (N=62) and interpreters (N=63) to a previous survey (Skrifvars et. al., 2025)
- Open questions
  - Describe the interview atmosphere
  - How do you maintain and create rapport?
  - What do you find challenging about rapport building?
  - How do you encourage applicants to share personal details regarding sensitive topics? (interviewers only)



# Study 1 - Procedure

- Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyze answers
- Development of subthemes
- Based on these subthemes, 3 main themes were developed
  - Interview atmosphere
  - Rapport building efforts
  - Challenges to rapport building



# Study 1 – Results, Interview atmosphere

- Tense

*“From the client’s side usually tension at the start, later relaxed. Willingness to cooperate. An enormous need to get the matter sorted out.” -Interviewer 16*

*“Official, interrogation-like, friendly” -Interviewer 11*

- Formal

- *“Formal, trustful, unreal” -Interviewer 26*





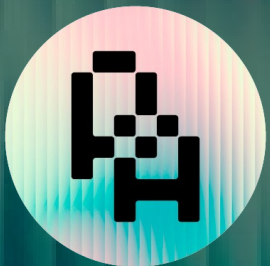
# Study 1 – Results, Interview atmosphere

- Open and safe

*“Usually during the interview, a relax(ed) and comfortable atmosphere is created, so that the applicant can talk about their things as well as possible. In my view this has been done well, even though the applicants’ stories can be very rough.” - Interpreter 18*

- Unpleasant emotions

*“Tiring, stressful, demanding. Deprecating!” - Interpreter 15*



# Study 1 – Rapport building efforts

- Informing and coordination
- Verbal rapport building efforts
- Personalizing interview
- Professionalism
- Non-verbal rapport building efforts
  - *“I make eye contact (but not too much, because that can feel threatening)” - Interpreter 8*





# Study 1 – Challenges in rapport building

- Applicant beliefs, attitudes or behaviors
  - *“Asylum seekers that have been in process for a long time and have had applications rejected often have a negative and even hostile attitude towards the interviewer, who functions as the face of the Immigration service in that moment. In these kinds of situations, creating a positive contact can be impossible, despite all efforts.” -Interviewer 24*
- Challenges related to other professionals
- Practical limitations
- Context hindering rapport
- Nothing, not hard at all



# Study 2 – What does rapport building look like in practice?

- Are the report behaviors reported in study 1 apparent in real interview reports
- Development of a code book based on study 1
- Sample of 60 real Finnish asylum cases (2017-2018)



## Study 2 – Results

- Very few rapport behaviors visible in the reports.
- Most of the observed rapport behaviors were informal discussions at the start of the interview
- Some informing and coordination also visible



# Discussion

- Interviewers reported their rapport building efforts very consistently
- Interpreters had varying approaches to rapport building
- Is rapport building the interpreters job?
- Interpreters the only ones to bring up ethnic conflicts or stereotypes



**Thank you for your attention!**



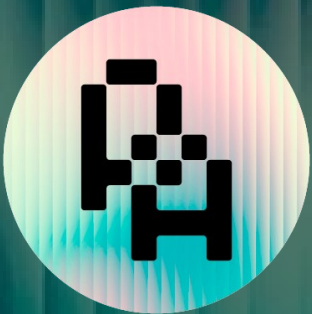
**Questions?**



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