

Challenges of implementing best practice interviewing in Finnish asylum interviews – A field reflection

Jenny Skrifvars & Julia Korkman

Faculty of Human and Social Sciences

Åbo Akademi University

jenny.skrifvars@abo.fi



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

Asylum interviews

Cross-cultural setting

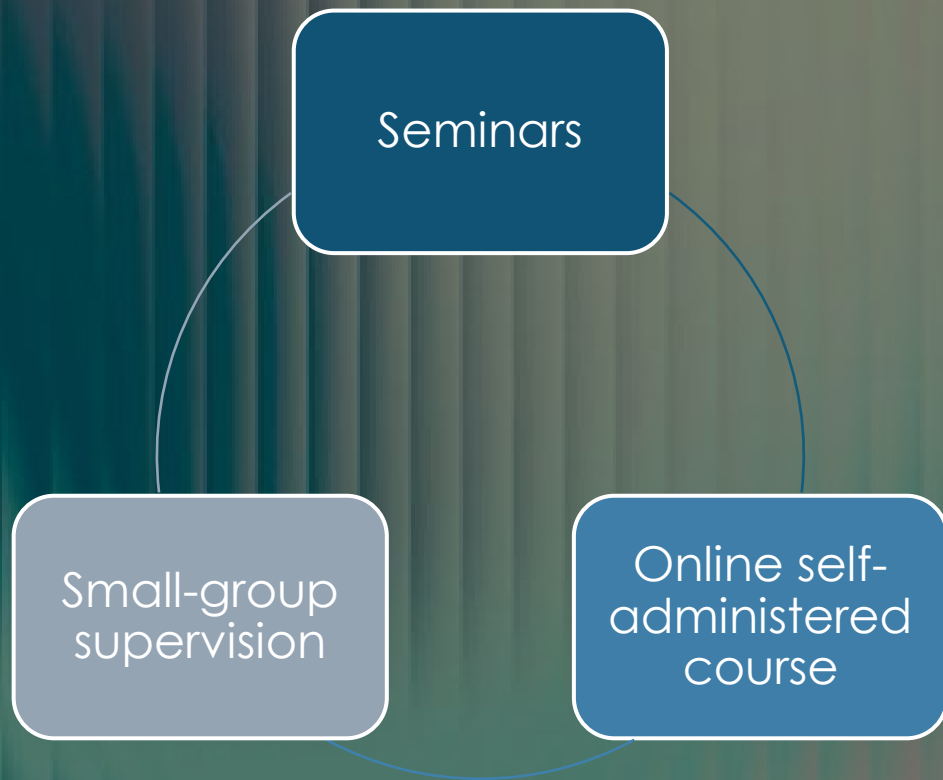
Interpreter-assisted

Vulnerable individuals

Interviews only partially in line with best practice:

- Information-gathering style
- Overreliance on closed questions
- Misunderstandings and complex questions

Training program in legal psychology



Training program content:

- Investigative interviewing, memory, culture, trauma, decision-making and credibility assessments

Pretest – posttest evaluation with waitlist control group:

- Significant improvements in know how

Reflections from the training

Based on participants' written reports during seminars and the trainers' observations

Two main topics:

- Organizational constraints regarding interviewing procedures
- Practical challenges related to questioning techniques

Organizational constraints



Questioning techniques

Science-based foundations: Information-gathering approach, open questions

Challenges when applying recommendations in practice

Talking too little... or too much!

Too little

- Brief answers
- Difficulty providing free narratives

Too
much

- Long but unfocused narratives
- Difficult to redirect without harming rapport

The ideal asylum interview method

- strategies, techniques and considerations**

CULTURAL HUMILITY – THE OVERARCHING MINDSET

BEFORE INTERVIEW

Trust

Instructions

Expectations

DURING INTERVIEW

Foundations

Trauma-informed approach

Rapport-building

Funnel structure of questioning:

Free recall phase

Open-ended follow up questions

Probing questions

Yes/no

Adaptive tools*

Talk too little

Model Statement (MS) or
Narrative Practice

Complex life
history

Life History
Calendar (LHC) or
Timeline Technique

Complex social
networks or
relationships

The RING task

Time limits

Self-Administered
Interview

*** Needs experimental
testing and validation!**

Key message:

See the problems?
Please help!

Key message:

1. More research testing the techniques in ecologically valid settings
2. Specialized tasks and effective training
3. Challenging work + organizational constraints
 - ➡ high turnover
 - ➡ limited effect of training

Thank you for your attention!



Dr. Jenny Skrifvars, jenny.skrifvars@abo.fi
Prof. of Prac. Julia Korkman, julia.korkman@abo.fi
Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland



Jenny Skrifvars
Psych-AID



@PsychAID

[@psychaid.bsky.social](https://psychaid.bsky.social)

References

- Freedman, D., Thornton, A., Camburn, D., Alwin, D., & Young-DeMarco, L. (1988). The life history calendar: A technique for collecting retrospective data. *Sociological Methodology*, 18, 37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/271044>
- Hayes, B. E. (2016). Impact of victim, offender, and relationship characteristics on frequency and timing of intimate partner violence using life history calendar data. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 53(2), 189–219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427815597038>
- Hope, L., Mullis, R., & Gabbert, F. (2013). Who? What? When? Using a timeline technique to facilitate recall of a complex event. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 2(1), 20–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2013.01.002>
- Hope, L., Kontogianni, F., Geyer, K., & Thomas, W. (2019). Development of the reporting information about networks and groups (RING) task: A method for eliciting information from memory about associates, groups, and networks. [Development of the RING task] *Journal of Forensic Practice*, 21(4), 240-247. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/JFP-04-2019-0011>
- Mourato, M. A., Launay, C., & Py, J. (2025). Interviewing for asylum: how the motive for application shapes information needs. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2025.2524752>
- Skrifvars, J., Antfolk, J., & Korkman, J., (2025). Developing and evaluating a training programme in legal psychology for Finnish asylum officials, *Psychology, Crime & Law*, DOI: 10.1080/1068316X.2025.2456254
- Skrifvars, J., Antfolk, J., van Veldhuizen, T., Sui, V., & Korkman, J. (2022). Eliciting information in official Finnish asylum interviews. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 36(3), 508-519. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3936>
- Skrifvars, J., Ilmoni, A., Siegfriids, L., Galán, M., Selim, H., Stevens, L., Korkman, J. and Antfolk, J. (2025b), Experiences of asylum interviews by asylum officials, interpreters and asylum seekers in Finland, *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 15(2), pp. 260-280. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-09-2024-0085>
- Skrifvars, J., Korkman, J., Sui, V., van Veldhuizen, T., & Antfolk, J. (2020). An analysis of question style and type in official Finnish asylum interview transcripts. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 17(3), 333-348.
- van Veldhuizen, T.S., Maas, R.P.A.E., Horselenberg, R. and van Koppen, P.J. (2018), Establishing origin: analysing the questions asked in asylum interviews, *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 25(2), pp. 283-302, doi: 10.1080/13218719.2017.1376607.
- van Veldhuizen, T.S., Horselenberg, R., Granhag, P.A., van Koppen, P.J. and Landström, S. (2016), Interviewing asylum seekers: a vignette study on the questions asked to assess credibility of claims about origin and persecution, *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 14(1), pp. 3-22, doi: 10.1002/jip.1472.