

Part I

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The purpose of this section is to review the broad issues in the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies that are used to study the question of refugee psychosocial wellness. In the first chapter, Frederick Ahearn explores through searches of various psychological databases the meaning of psychosocial well-being as currently used by researchers. Given the currency of the psychodynamic approach in these publications, he addresses the dimensions of stress, loss, social supports, separation, trauma, and coping and discusses difficulties in doing cross-cultural investigations using Western concepts and instruments. In addition, he identifies the strengths and weaknesses that are inherent in qualitative and quantitative research designs and, finally, argues that a researcher studying refugee behavior in the aftermath of displacement should: 1) focus on a person's strengths rather than a person's deficits (well-being instead of pathology); 2) utilize both quantitative and qualitative strategies; and 3) make every effort to replicate, validate, and standardize their instruments and measurements. Recommendations are offered to students, practitioners, researchers, policy-makers, administrators, and educators for the study of the psychosocial well-being of refugees and displaced persons.

In the second chapter, Alastair Ager speaks of the need for research and evaluation in the field of psychosocial intervention as crucial elements in the process of policy-setting, planning, and implementing sound and appropriate programs and services for refugees. In his theoretical discussion of quantitative methodologies, he illustrates through case examples the key questions of measurements, the definition and operationalization of concepts, reliability,

validity, bias, and sampling. He notes the importance of connecting one's interpretation and the significance of one's findings with the ability to generalize these to other groups. In like manner, Ager also explores theoretical concerns in the use of qualitative approaches, especially the points of measurement, interpretation, triangulation, comprehensiveness, and transferability of findings. Again he employs case examples to highlight these points. Finally, there is a discussion of the use of multimethod approaches in the study of refugee psychosocial wellness.

The purpose of this section then is to give the reader an orientation to the broad theoretical issues involved in doing research with refugees and in evaluating psychosocial programs. Competent research will provide answers to questions regarding a program's effectiveness, explore and further deepen our understanding of the psychological reactions of refugees, and provide a basis for accountability for program managers and practitioners. Finally, these two chapters, in their description of the underpinnings of quantitative and qualitative methods, set the stage for the case illustrations that are presented in subsequent chapters.