

Part II

**CASE STUDIES OF
REFUGEE PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLNESS**

Qualitative Approaches

In this part, we turn our attention to the key dimensions of qualitative research of refugee psychosocial wellness, which aims at exploring the world from the perspective of the person studied, “the insider’s view.” Qualitative investigations are inherently different from quantitative studies: different assumptions, different processes to construct and establish “the truth,” and different ways to categorize information and make conclusions. The role of the qualitative researcher, as we will see from the following chapters, is to become immersed into a community in order to discover its values, norms, standards, rituals, relationships, and interactions, and ultimately the meanings of these.

In chapter 3, Patricia Omidian writes of her experiences as an anthropologist studying the lives and adjustment of Afghan refugees who resettled in the United States, offering a first-hand account of how she planned her research, approached the subjects of her study, and crafted and used the findings on behalf of her client group. She carefully defines the meaning of qualitative investigation, citing the issues of sampling, reliability, and validity. The array of methods that she employed in her work consisted of participant observation, questionnaires, life histories and case studies, and various types of group interviews, each centered in examples of her actual work with resettled Afghans. What one does with the data once it is collected is addressed, as are the personal issues that researchers discover when working with individuals and families who have experienced great loss.

In the next chapter, another anthropologist, Marita Eastmond, takes us by the hand through the qualitative research process, describ-

ing how she studied refugees from Chile, Bosnia, and Guatemala. As a medical anthropologist, her main concern has been the exploration of suffering and illness through an ethnographic perspective. In this approach, she locates the health and illness of refugees in the context of their local social worlds in an effort to investigate ways in which people, as part of their society and culture, interpret their experiences. Three examples of her work illustrate her assumptions, methods, and findings in assessing the psychosocial well-being of these refugee groups.

Also in this section, the reader will find an example of qualitative research that deals with Cambodians and Vietnamese in a refugee camp in Thailand. Didier Bertrand in chapter 5 presents the use of autobiography as an approach in investigating psychosocial well-being of refugees and demonstrates how the autobiographical interview touches the complexities of the refugee's life, his/her actions, and the meaning of these behaviors and the environment in which they take place. Empathy, neutrality, management of emotions, and their implications are essential parts of this process. Finally, Bertrand reviews the strategies that he has employed in his work to analyze biographical material and arrive at conclusions.

These three chapters, then, cover a range of approaches to qualitative studies in which the authors specify their assumptions, illustrate the techniques they used in the research process, and discuss the strategies they employed to collate, understand, and present their findings.