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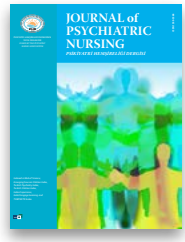

Letter to the Editor

Probation: An overlooked field for psychiatric nursing

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Dear Editor,

Probation is a practice with roots dating back to the 19th century, initially based on suspending a court-imposed sentence under certain conditions while allowing the individual to remain in the community. Its historical development was shaped particularly by various practices concerning the suspension of sentence enforcement in England and the United States.[1] In England, the legal foundations of the modern probation system were strengthened by the *Probation of Offenders Act* of 1907. Over time, probation evolved into an institutionalized field of service aimed at supervising and rehabilitating individuals in the community and reducing the risk of reoffending.[2,3] In Europe, probation practices became increasingly widespread throughout the 20th century, becoming integrated into the criminal justice systems of different countries and emerging as an important component of community-based sanctions, rehabilitation, and social reintegration policies.[4,5] According to the Council of Europe's 2025 *Annual Penal Statistics Report*, approximately 1.4 million people are under probation supervision across Europe.[6] Although probation has a history spanning more than a century internationally, its development in Türkiye is relatively recent, with its place in the modern criminal justice system established by Law No. 5402 on Probation Services, which entered into force on July 20, 2005.[7] According to data as of April 30, 2026, there are 140 Probation Directorates operating across Türkiye, with a total of 494,692 individuals subject to probation measures.[8] Taken together, its historical development, institutional structure, and the number of individuals currently receiving probation services indicate that probation has become an increasingly extensive component of the criminal justice system and an important area of practice for forensic mental health services.

Although individuals under probation do not constitute a homogeneous group, they represent a vulnerable population that experiences higher rates of health problems than the general population and faces mental disorders and substance use disorders alongside adverse social determinants of health, such as social exclusion, deprivation, unemployment, and homelessness.[9] Accordingly, the World Health Organization recommends that community-based, person-centered, and human rights-based mental health services be made accessible, particularly to such vulnerable groups.[10] In line with this approach, probation is implemented not merely as a mechanism for monitoring individuals in the community and ensuring compliance with legal obligations but also as a comprehensive system that supports rehabilitation, the prevention of reoffending, and social reintegration. In England and Wales, which have made important historical and institutional contributions to the development of probation systems in many countries, including Türkiye, probation services encompass multidimensional interventions such as individual counseling, psychosocial support, rehabilitation programs, referral to treatment services for substance use, and coordination with community-based health services.[11] However, studies indicate that interventions aimed at promoting mental health and rehabilitation among individuals under probation remain limited and are often restricted to short-term, one-off interventions.[9] This situation highlights the need for mental health support interventions within probation to be planned in a more systematic and sustainable manner.

The effectiveness of probation services depends on a multidisciplinary approach in which individuals' legal, psychosocial, and health needs are addressed together.[4] Internationally, these services are delivered through collaboration among

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probation officers, mental health professionals, social workers, substance use treatment teams, and other healthcare professionals and are structured to facilitate referrals based on individuals' risks and needs and to ensure continuity of care.[3] In Türkiye, probation directorates primarily employ probation personnel, psychologists, and social workers, while treatment and rehabilitation processes for individuals with substance use disorders are conducted in collaboration with healthcare institutions.[7,12] However, the roles and responsibilities of psychiatric nurses within this system have not yet been systematically structured in a manner that adequately reflects their competencies in mental health assessment, psychosocial interventions, care coordination, and rehabilitation. Given the complex mental health needs of individuals under probation and their ongoing need for monitoring, this gap represents an important area requiring attention. Within this multidisciplinary structure, forensic psychiatric nursing is of particular importance because of its potential to make distinctive contributions to addressing mental health needs.

The community-based nature of probation, which aims to support individuals within their living environments while maintaining their connections with existing social resources and health services, substantially overlaps with the core practice areas of forensic psychiatric nursing. Forensic psychiatric nursing aims to strengthen continuity between health and justice services by assessing the mental and psychosocial needs of individuals in contact with the criminal justice system, identifying risks, supporting treatment and rehabilitation processes, and contributing to individuals' ability to maintain safe and functional lives in the community.[13,14] In this regard, probation can be considered an important community-based practice setting in which forensic psychiatric nurses can make substantial contributions to mental health assessment, risk management, psychosocial support, and rehabilitation processes. Nevertheless, the role and visibility of psychiatric nurses within this system remain insufficiently defined in relation to their clinical competencies. This situation highlights the need to reconsider the place of forensic psychiatric nursing within probation services.

In conclusion, probation is not merely a criminal justice practice but a multidimensional field at the intersection of mental health, substance use treatment, and community-based rehabilitation. To adequately address individuals' complex mental health and psychosocial needs, probation services should extend beyond judicial supervision and the monitoring of legal obligations and adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses social reintegration. Within this framework, developing education and specialization opportunities in forensic psychiatric nursing in Türkiye, defining the roles and responsibilities of psychiatric nurses within multidisciplinary teams, and expanding evidence-based practices in this field are important priorities. Such a structure could facilitate the systematic recognition of psychiatric nurses' contributions to probation services and strengthen the capacity for practice and research in this area. Therefore, probation represents an important community-based field that warrants further development in psychiatric nursing, particularly forensic psychiatric nursing.

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