

Ethics of genealogy data use for solving crimes discussed

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(HealthDay)—Use of online genealogy data for solving crimes raises

complex ethical issues, according to an article published online May 29 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Benjamin E. Berkman, J.D., M.P.H., from the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, and colleagues discussed the ethics related to use of online genealogy data to solve crimes. The ethical discussion relates to issues of informed consent, privacy, and justice.

The researchers note that it is unclear whether users of online genealogy sites are aware that their [genetic data](#) are available to criminal investigators; many companies either do not inform users that their information may be available to criminal investigators or mention it in their terms of service, which may not be read or internalized. Although a person may give consent to use of his or her materials for future biomedical research, a distinction exists between biomedical research and forensics. Concerns are also expressed about the implications of genealogy service users' data for others, with data potentially leading to arrest of guilty relatives and false-positives creating burdens for innocent parties. Individuals differ in terms of their views on whether potential [crime](#) solving justifies the repurposing of genealogy data. Better informed consent would alleviate some of the ethical issues associated with criminal genealogy searching.

"We recommend using forensic [genealogy](#) as an investigative tool rather than a primary source of evidence of criminal wrongdoing," the authors write.

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