

# Bioethicists suggest ethical considerations for forensic use of genetic data

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Despite the popularity of online genealogy services, it is unclear whether users understand that their genetic information is available for forensic purposes. Bioethicists from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) suggest a framework for ethical discussions about how and when genealogy data should be used for crime-solving. Their paper is published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The use of genealogy data for criminal justice purposes made news when authorities arrested the suspected Golden State Killer, a serial rapist and murderer who terrorized California decades ago, after matching DNA from multiple crime scenes to DNA obtained from online genealogy data. While the arrest was celebrated, the case has raised questions about the ethics of using online genealogy data for solving crimes. Bioethicists from the NIH say that three interrelated topics should be considered when discussing the ethical use of online [genealogy](#) data: informed consent, privacy, and justice.

According to the authors, these ethical considerations are important because citizens have rights, and also because DNA evidence can be misused. The crime-solving potential of readily available DNA evidence is exciting, but it raises many issues that must be addressed.

**More information:** *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2018).  
[annals.org/aim/article/doi/10.7326/M18-1348](https://annals.org/aim/article/doi/10.7326/M18-1348)

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