

THE FORENSEQ PROJECT: ASSESSING PUBLIC PREFERENCES AND POLICY OPTIONS FOR INVESTIGATIVE GENETIC GENEALOGY

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Since the arrest of the Golden State Killer in April 2018, investigative genetic genealogy (IGG) has helped close hundreds of cases in the United States, but there are persistent concerns that this technique violates the privacy interests of participants in genetic genealogy databases and their families. Past studies have demonstrated that individuals are concerned about genetic privacy, yet they are willing to share their genetic data to support activities that they believe are important, such as medical research. However, all of these studies pre-date IGG, and none probed the public's attitudes towards law enforcement participation in genealogy databases. In 2020, we obtained funding from the National Human Genome Research Institute to conduct a 4-year study of public preferences related to IGG for the purpose of informing practice and policy. In this poster, we will describe the project activities and report preliminary findings. Specifically, we have concluded in-depth interviews with over 20 law enforcement personnel, forensic scientists, genetic genealogy firms, and genetic genealogists to obtain a technically precise and comprehensive description of IGG practices and forecasts of its future. Analysis of the data suggests several trends, including development of IGG expertise at all levels of law enforcement, expansion of genetic genealogy consultants and firms, emergence of self-regulation among those conducting IGG, and influence of public opinion on IGG practices. Future project activities include conducting focus groups to identify what the public believes are the most salient attributes of law enforcement participation in genetic genealogy databases; a general population survey to measure public preferences relevant to IGG; and a modified policy Delphi with expert stakeholders to identify recommended practices for IGG.