

What use is a DNA database? Alex Jeffreys

AJ: As of 2007, four million DNA profiles on the UK database, five million plus profiles on the United States database, worldwide, so most countries now have a national database. Worldwide we've now got about twelve million plus people, mainly criminals, logged into those databases. It's an enormously powerful tool in the fight against crime.

In England and Wales, if you have a crime scene sample that yields DNA, simply by looking up on the database you'll find your prime suspect, in round about 53 or 54 percent of cases. In Scotland it's up at 68 percent. Quite remarkable. So this is a shortcut, if you like, to a lot of police investigative work. Get your DNA, you're probably going to essentially solve the case on the spot. So the impact's extraordinary. Major impact on detection rates of volume crime, like car theft and burglary. The detection rate has shot right up thanks to the availability of DNA.

What we're now seeing, there are various international conventions have been drawn up, which now allow information to be compared between national DNA databases, so both the G8 countries, and separately, Interpol, have established protocols whereby, you know if you've got a crime in Britain that you can't solve, well maybe we've got a sneaky feeling it might be a Dutch person or something like that, or vice versa. So you start exchanging information to see if you get matches outside your country, and a number of really quite serious offences have been solved by exactly that approach.

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