

DNA and the end of privacy - could it protect the rights of the child?

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DNA analysis is a powerful tool for researchers, scientists and law enforcement. But in the everyday lives of people across the globe, affordable access to DNA testing has brought about a seismic shift. For the first time, donor conceived people can find their biological fathers, mothers or siblings. Donor conception has exploded in the last three and a half decades, but around the world it faces little regulation. Fertility clinics public and private have operated without limits on the numbers of children created from individual donors, without health checks, and largely with impunity. Drawing both from my published work and personal experience, I will explain how people conceived under “anonymous” sperm or egg donation regimes can now find their biological family with nothing more than their own DNA - genetic material from the donor is not required. It’s a burgeoning practice with vast implications for the medical sector, ethics, and the law. In a world where the trade in gametes has gone global, it’s perfectly possible for a child to be born of a Ukrainian egg, South African sperm, carried by a surrogate in India, and taken straight after birth to live in Singapore. Some experts have criticised this as trafficking. Access to affordable DNA testing provides a powerful boost for the rights of the child, which according to the UN include the fundamental right to family and identity. The answers provided by DNA are answers which authorities such as the medical profession, the law, and the state have refused to provide.