

# Judicial Application of DNA Fingerprinting: Analyzing Genetic Evidence in Forensic Contexts

LéonieMena Kasmiri\*

Department of Plant Biochemistry, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland

## INTRODUCTION

DNA fingerprinting, also known as DNA profiling, represents a pivotal advancement in forensic science, transforming how genetic evidence is utilized within the judicial system. Developed by Sir Alec Jeffreys in 1984, this technique relies on the analysis of polymorphic regions in the genome to create unique identifiers for individuals. In legal contexts, DNA fingerprinting has become indispensable, providing a high level of precision in linking suspects to crimes or exonerating the wrongfully accused.

## DESCRIPTION

### The science of DNA fingerprinting

DNA fingerprinting operates on the principle that each individual's DNA is unique, with the exception of identical twins. This uniqueness is primarily due to variations in the non-coding regions of the genome, specifically microsatellites or Short Tandem Repeats (STRs), and Variable Number Tandem Repeats (VNTRs). These regions are highly polymorphic, meaning they vary significantly between individuals.

The process involves several key steps:

**Sample collection:** Biological samples such as blood, saliva, or hair are collected from crime scenes or suspects.

**DNA extraction:** The DNA is isolated from the collected samples using chemical and physical methods.

**Amplification:** Specific regions of interest, often STRs, are amplified using Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), which generates millions of copies of these regions for analysis.

**Separation and detection:** The amplified DNA fragments are separated by size using gel electrophoresis or capillary electrophoresis, and then detected and visualized.

**Comparison and matching:** The resulting DNA profiles are compared to those of known individuals or other samples from the crime scene to determine matches or exclusions.

### Forensic and judicial implications

In forensic contexts, DNA fingerprinting has revolutionized the way evidence is handled. Its primary applications include:

**Criminal investigation:** DNA profiles can link suspects to crime scenes or victims. For example, if a suspect's DNA matches DNA found at a crime scene, this provides a strong indication of their presence at the location. This application is crucial in solving cases involving violent crimes, property crimes, and sexual assaults.

**Exoneration:** DNA fingerprinting has played a significant role in overturning wrongful convictions. By comparing DNA from crime scenes with that of convicted individuals, the technique can confirm or refute guilt, leading to the exoneration of innocent people. Notably, organizations such as The Innocence Project have used DNA evidence to exonerate numerous wrongfully convicted individuals.

**Paternity testing:** DNA fingerprinting is also used in establishing biological relationships, such as paternity. By comparing the DNA profiles of a child and alleged parent, the biological link can be confirmed with high certainty.

### Legal and ethical considerations

The judicial application of DNA fingerprinting raises several legal and ethical issues:

**Privacy concerns:** The collection and storage of DNA samples pose privacy risks. Legal frameworks often regulate how DNA data is handled, including who can access it and for what purposes. Ensuring that DNA databases are secure and that personal information is protected is critical.

**Chain of custody:** The integrity of DNA evidence is paramount. Proper documentation and handling are necessary to maintain the chain of custody, ensuring that the evidence remains unaltered and is admissible in court.

**Probabilistic nature of DNA evidence:** While DNA fingerprinting is highly accurate, it is not infallible. The interpretation of DNA evidence involves statistical probabilities,

**Correspondence to:** LéonieMena Kasmiri, Department of Plant Biochemistry, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland; E-mail: MenaLeonie\_kasmiri@gmail.com

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which can be influenced by factors such as sample degradation or contamination. Courts must ensure that forensic experts present evidence in a way that accurately reflects its probabilistic nature.

Ethical implications of genetic databases: The creation and maintenance of genetic databases for law enforcement purposes raise ethical questions. Issues include the potential for misuse of genetic information and the impact on individual privacy rights.

## CONCLUSION

The judicial application of DNA fingerprinting has fundamentally altered forensic science, providing a robust tool for criminal investigation and exoneration. While its accuracy and

reliability are well-established, ongoing attention to legal, ethical, and privacy concerns is essential. As forensic technology continues to advance, the integration of DNA fingerprinting into the judicial system will require careful consideration of these factors to ensure justice is served while protecting individual rights. The continued evolution of this technology promises to enhance its application in the courtroom, ultimately leading to more accurate and equitable legal outcomes.