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DNA technology to progress more cold cases

Cutting edge DNA technology is set to be used to help solve a number of cold cases as part of Operation Advance

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Twenty serious undetected Operation Advance cases have been assessed and selected to undergo familial searching of the National DNA Database (NDNAD). Each of these cases has yielded a full DNA profile that has not been matched to an individual on the NDNAD.

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Familial searching, developed by the Forensic Science Service's Forensic Intelligence Bureau (FIB), identifies potential relatives of the offender, who are already on the NDNAD, through their DNA profile. It is based on the fact that DNA profiles of those who are related are more likely to contain similarities than profiles from two unrelated individuals. Familial searches can provide two lines of enquiry: the identity of individuals who could be a parent or child of the offender or the offender's sibling.

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The results from the familial search are prioritised using other intelligence, such as age, ethnicity and geography.

There are also several social assumptions that help to prioritise the outcomes from familial searching. These are:

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1) Individuals raised in a family environment of criminal offending are more likely to adopt a similar (criminal) lifestyle.

2) Families at the lower end of the socio-economic scale tend to disperse less than families at the higher end of the scale.

3) Criminals tend to commit offences either close to where they reside, or at least in areas well known to them.

The cold cases due to benefit from familial searching were discussed at a conference yesterday (December 7) involving the FSS, the Home Office, the Police Standards Unit (PSU) and representatives from the forces taking part.

The conference included an in-depth explanation of familial searching and the processes and management of cold cases that have been developed as a result of Operation Advance.

Speaking at the conference DAC Alan Given, deputy director of PSU, stressed the important message this kind of operation gives out to criminals. He said: "We may not catch you today but we will catch you. People should believe technology will catch up with them in the end."

Operation Advance has already proved to be a resounding success, progressing 148 historic unsolved cases by upgrading old crime stains and loading them to the NDNAD. So far 34 individuals have been matched to crime stains and four people have been arrested and charged with rape offences as a direct result of Operation Advance.

Familial Searching was first successfully used back in 2002 in a case where it subsequently transpired the offender was already dead. Since then there have been three

successful convictions. In April 2004 Craig Harman was successfully convicted of manslaughter after he admitted killing lorry driver Michael Little by throwing a brick from a motorway footbridge. In December 2003 Jason Thomas Ward was charged with the brutal rape and murder of 87-year-old Gladys Godfrey following a familial search. And most recently Daniel Alderson was sentenced to six years in prison for two separate offences of indecent assault.

Richard Pinchin, head of FIB said: "The aim is to shorten the timescale between having a DNA profile and a conviction as in that intervening time there may be other incidents."

Ends

Notes to editor:

More details about Craig Harman and other casefiles can be found by visiting www.forensic.gov.uk

The National DNA Database (NDNAD) currently holds 2.8 million DNA profiles

The FSS is an executive agency of the Home Office. It provides a national service, primarily to the 43 police forces of England and Wales, the Crown Prosecution Service, HM Customs and Excise, HM Coroners and other agencies.

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