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## Sly DNA tests show 1 in 3 dads duped

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30 January 2005  
By TIM HUME

Hundreds of Kiwi men are paying out almost \$900 for secret tests in Australia to determine whether they are really a dad.

And the company which runs the tests says that in one in three cases, the man finds he's been duped.

The men have been secretly sending samples of saliva or hair to Australian clinic DNA Solutions because they often find the test here is blocked when the mother won't give her consent.

The tests are used by men who suspect they are not the child's biological father, to disprove fatherhood of children they are paying for - and in some cases to get access to a child they believe is theirs.

Fathers' rights groups say the secret "motherless tests" provide vital protection for men and children in a system where women can abuse their position as "gatekeepers" and commit paternity fraud by concealing a child's true father.

"These tests are just giving people the right to know," says Bruce Tichbon, of Families Apart Require Equality (FARE). "Fathers have a right to know, but even more importantly, children have a right to know."

The 20-year-old technology is reliable and affordable but paternity tests in New Zealand are difficult to get. The only laboratory which does the tests here, DNA Diagnostics, insists on having the mother's consent. Obtaining a test through the courts can be cumbersome and laborious.

FARE advised fathers to get the test done overseas. Although it could not be presented as evidence by the courts, it would provide valuable peace of mind. "We tell people, don't get it done here. Bigger the system, it's bankrupt," said Tichbon. "Women used to get backstreet abortions, now men have to get backstreet paternity tests."

DNA Solutions, the only company to directly market its services to New Zealand men, says it tests about 15 kiwi men a month.

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In 30% of cases, the samples did not match - meaning the man was not the child's father.

"It's our belief that men have every right to know if they are the father of a child," said DNA Solutions spokeswoman Kate Hurford.

The 30% mark is higher than New Zealand's estimates of "misattributed paternity" - men unwittingly raising children who are not biologically their own. That estimate ranges from 3% to 20%.

Stuart Birks, director of Massey University's Centre for Public Policy Evaluation, said low-income men were more likely to be raising someone else's child without knowing it.

"Nationally, a rate of 10% is highly likely, it could be as high as 20%," he said.

He thinks tests should be carried out to confirm fatherhood at birth.

"Surely it's better to expose it right at the start rather than waiting for a few years when it will have an even more traumatic effect," he said.

Tichbon believed widespread paternity testing would reveal thousands of New Zealand men paying child support for children not biologically their own, raising the spectre of massive child support repayments.

The Law Commission, which is reviewing the rules of legally proving parenthood, wants to clarify the law surrounding secret off-shore testing, which it says has a potentially "explosive" influence.

"We're of the view the other parent should always be informed of testing," said commissioner Frances Joychild. "We're considering not necessarily stopping them, but at least requiring the mother to be informed."

She said most paternity tests were conducted privately, outside the legal framework. The courts recommended only 32 paternity tests be conducted last year, but more than 180 were carried out without the mother's consent by DNA Solutions.

Given the volatility of the subject matter, it was important for tests to be conducted in a regulated environment with counselling and support. "It can be immensely psychologically damaging - it's not good that this is happening away from any legal controls."

DNA Solutions charges \$515 to \$895 for paternity tests, which compare mouth swabs or hair samples taken from the father and child.

Have you had a paternity test in Australia? Email [tim.hume@star-times.co.nz](mailto:tim.hume@star-times.co.nz)

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