

The intruder drills may prepare us, but they also feed our fear and despair. In some situations, survivors of earlier violence may experience a resurfacing of panic, because the drills can cause them to remember how they had felt then. They can also make people feel trapped, like they're drowning in their own memories. These drills are good for our safety but not for our mental health, for they negatively affect child survivors of violence and may end up adding to their trauma.

school and acknowledging the fact that I could die from a shooter shouldn't be deemed as a normal danger when going to a place of education. When I went to visit family in Ireland, the conversation of shooter drills came up. I asked my cousins if they had these drills in their schools. They looked at me in shock and said, 'No.' Shooter drills aren't normal, and American school children are taught that their lives are less important than the 'American right' to own a firearm."

“WHEN I WENT TO VISIT FAMILY IN IRELAND, THE CONVERSATION OF SHOOTER DRILLS CAME UP. I ASKED MY COUSINS IF THEY HAD THESE DRILLS IN THEIR SCHOOLS. THEY LOOKED AT ME IN SHOCK AND SAID, ‘NO.’ SHOOTER DRILLS AREN’T NORMAL, AND AMERICAN SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT THAT THEIR LIVES ARE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE ‘AMERICAN RIGHT’ TO OWN A FIREARM.”

While schools do prepare students for the worst, it doesn't eliminate the fact that people will continue to put children's safety at risk. Instead of school administrators and law enforcement asking "How can we keep our students safe when there is an active shooter?" they should look at the issue from a new perspective, focus on the source and find effective ways to help improve our mental health and keep us from feeling despair and loneliness.

Counseling.org reports that "78% of school shooters had a history of suicide attempts or suicidal ideations prior to their attack." With more mental health awareness and care, the numbers of school shootings can drop drastically and help keep students safer.

According to lawcenter.giffords.org, "1,500 children are shot and killed each year." While many government and law enforcement agencies work to keep the general public safe during active shooter emergencies, they may arrive too late to prevent casualties.

The easiest way to minimize these emergencies is to tighten gun laws. The same source continues, "On average, fewer people die from gun violence in states with strong gun laws and more people die in states with weak gun laws." Tightening gun laws will allow those who need a gun to feel safe to have access to them, while preventing the wrong people from having easy access to them.

The jury is still out as to these drills' effectiveness. Cecilia Burke, 14, of Naperville North High School, Ill., says, "Going to

Burke says that while drills do help keep students safe, such exercises should never reach a point where they can be viewed as a "normal." The constant reminders that students can be killed at any moment in places of education negatively affects their mental well-being, she says.

Although students like her agree that these drills have negative side effects, others believe they are for the best. Connor Ciske, 14, a high school student in Lombard, Ill., states, "School Shooter drills are just like earthquake drills. These are very real situations we all have to prepare for to improve safety and well-being for us and those around us."

But while Connor does make a strong point, is it fair to ask if our methods are working if they put the students' mental health at risk?

Both weaker gun laws and a lack of mental health support and awareness are major contributors to the alarming increase in gun violence and school shootings. Putting tighter laws on gun ownership and working to improve basic mental health can be extremely successful in ending frequent school shootings. Hundreds of thousands of lives can be saved by implementing these changes in our approach to gun violence incidents.

The thought of being in a school shooting is absolutely frightening. However, we, as a society, can all step up by helping to make these changes and improving the safety of the general public. [in](#)

Reham Fahad, 14, is student at Naperville Central High School in Illinois.

Muslim American Views on Organ Donation

A religiously tailored intervention project focuses on the permissibility of living and deceased organ donations

BY MEGAN CRAIG

IT IS UNCLEAR HOW MANY MUSLIMS IN the U.S. await organ transplants because the government doesn't keep transplantation statistics based on religion. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health does issue a report on "Organ Donation and African Americans," and its February 2020 report said that they make up the largest minority in need of an organ transplant. But Muslim Americans are ethnically a very diverse community.

What's even less clear is whether it's religiously permissible for Muslims to donate organs.

In a recent study, "Informing American Muslims about Organ Donation (I AM a LD): A Randomized Controlled Cross-Over Trial Evaluating the Effect of Religiously Tailored Health Education" (2020), a team led by Dr. Aasim Padela, a researcher, bioethicist and emergency medicine doctor at the University of Chicago, attempted to address this uncertainty. As director of the university's Initiative on Islam and Medicine, Padela's career has focused on the intersection of community health and religion, and his research has largely centered on health behavior changes for Muslim patients.

After looking into other organ donation-focused interventional education programs, Padela identified a common issue: the overt promotion and one-sided presentations that show only those arguments that favor such donations from both religious and medical perspectives. However, such programs — held during the past few decades both at home and abroad — hadn't significantly changed participants' ideas or behaviors.

Thus, Padela's team took a different approach — creating a partnership among medical, organ donation and health

education organizations. The study, conducted over several months, included presentations at mosques in Chicagoland and the Washington, D.C., area. Instead of presenting only the relevant information in a positive light, educators highlighted both the pros and cons of living and deceased donation from the religious and medical perspectives. Question-and-answer periods and peer-led discussion aimed to foster participants' understanding of all sides of the issue.

"If people feel manipulated, like they're being given only half the information, that tends to backfire," explained Dr. Michael Quinn, a social psychologist who worked with Padela to create the study. He said people can better recall information when they feel they've been given the chance to make choices based on all of the available information.

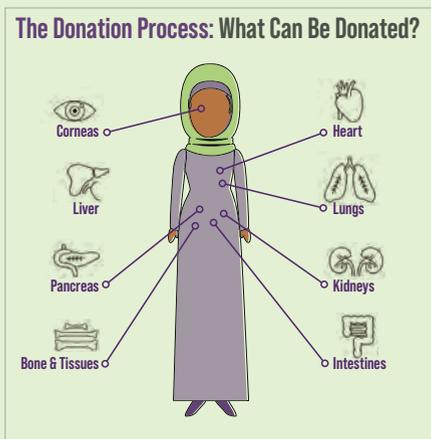
The team's strategy worked. Initial study data shows that participants increased their understanding of the relevant medical information and Islamic perspectives and, after the educational sessions, felt more prepared to make such decisions for themselves and their loved ones.

FOR THE COMMUNITY, BY THE COMMUNITY

By collaborating with people doing grassroots outreach and holding educational sessions inside mosques, the research team hoped to make the study's participants feel at ease while learning the material. A community advisory board of mosque leaders and health advocates helped the team think through its two-sided approach and identify the best speakers for the religious part of the education sessions.

"I think the fact that we held these workshops in a mosque setting and had permission of mosque leadership allowed people to put some faith in us," Quinn said. "We still had doctors and people from the Kidney Foundation talk about their areas of specialty, but they did this in the context of going into the community, of being there, of being part of that system."

The community advisory board also identified candidates for an important part of the study: peer education. People are more likely to open up to peer educators than to medical professionals, because those peers have the same cultural background — "They're known, and they're trusted," Quinn noted.



SUCH AN APPROACH MAKES IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR GROUPS LIKE GIFT OF HOPE TO MAKE BLANKET STATEMENTS ABOUT WHAT RELIGIONS TEACH WHEN TALKING WITH FAMILIES ABOUT ORGAN DONATION. AFTER ALL, FEW PEOPLE APPRECIATE BEING TOLD WHAT THEY BELIEVE BY AN OUTSIDER.

The peer educators weren't there to persuade participants to think a certain way about organ donation; instead, they allowed open, non-judgmental discussions about the potential benefits and costs of this procedure from all perspectives.

"The more people could discuss it, the better they would be able to retain that information and use it faithfully down the road," Quinn said.

TAKING INFORMATION INTO A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Despite commonalities among many believers, "religions are not monolithic," stated Susan Cochran, an after-care specialist for

donor families with Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network (<https://www.giftofhope.org>) in Illinois. Cochran works with families who have lost loved ones and donated their organs.

And because she holds a master's degree in religion, Cochran also works with the organization's Interfaith Advisory Council, a group of religious representatives that seeks to help Gift of Hope better support families and medical professionals. Cochran helped develop the presentations used in the study.

After stating that religions contain diverse sects, beliefs, foundational theologies and familial influences, Cochran said, "People's identities are multifaceted; they aren't just Muslim, they're also brothers, spouses, medical professionals, government officials. We've found it much more useful to affirm the diversity within identity among these groups." Moreover, "It's much more helpful to educate a population about organ and tissue donation from a point of cultural and religious humility."

Such an approach makes it nearly impossible for groups like Gift of Hope to make blanket statements about what religions teach when talking with families about organ donation. After all, few people appreciate being told what they believe by an outsider.

Padela hopes the educational intervention helped at least some participants who were struggling to answer questions about this procedure's religious permissibility. Participants are more prepared now to make such decisions and are more likely to seek out and understand different religious perspectives on the issue. They'll also share their newfound knowledge with other community members, thereby allowing it to have an effect beyond the confines of the study.

"Kindness and respect and open conversation carry a lot of power," Cochran said. "When you show a community respect and give them information, they're able to make powerful decisions for themselves and their family." *ih*

Megan Craig is a freelance reporter and editor based in Syracuse, N.Y., who also teaches reporting and journalism ethics classes at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. In 2011, she donated her left kidney.

[Editor's note: The author was involved in the aforementioned research study funded by Grant #R39OT31104 "Informing American Muslims about Living Donation" [PI: Padela] from the Health Resources and Services Administration, as former director of programs at the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois.]