

Communication and Dialogue with Islamic Religious Scholars: A Focus Group Discussion to Enhance Human Papillomavirus Vaccine Awareness and Uptake In Northern Nigeria

Mohammed M Manga¹, Rasheed Abdulganiy¹, Umar Mohammed Hassan¹, Halima Usman Farouk¹, Danladi Adamu Bojude¹, Yahaya Mohammed², Abdulshaheed Bello¹, Aliyu Usman El-Nafaty¹, Marc Steben³

1. Gombe state University (GSU)/Federal Teaching Hospital (FTH) and Papillomavirus Society; Gombe Nigeria (PSGN), 2. Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto Nigeria, 3. Canadian network for HPV Prevention and IPVS, Geneva, Switzerland

Introduction

Nigeria introduced HPV vaccine (HPVv) in 2023/2024. There was history of antivaccine activities particularly among Islamic scholars who play a critical role in proper understanding and acceptability immunization in northern Nigeria. However, their insights, views and perspectives are rarely documented. This focus group discussion was organized for Islamic scholars to explore and identify potential barriers and facilitators for HPVv uptake.

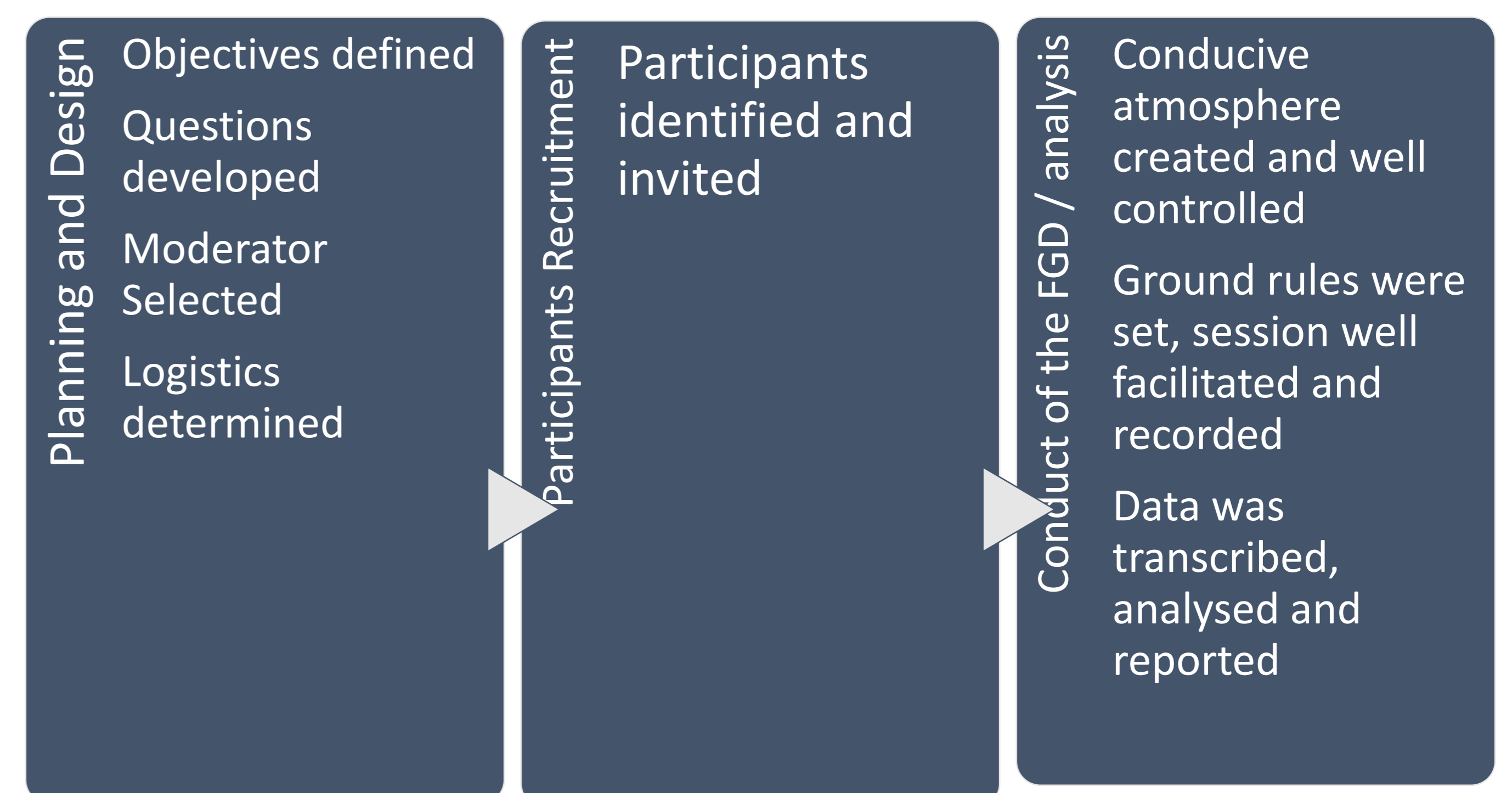
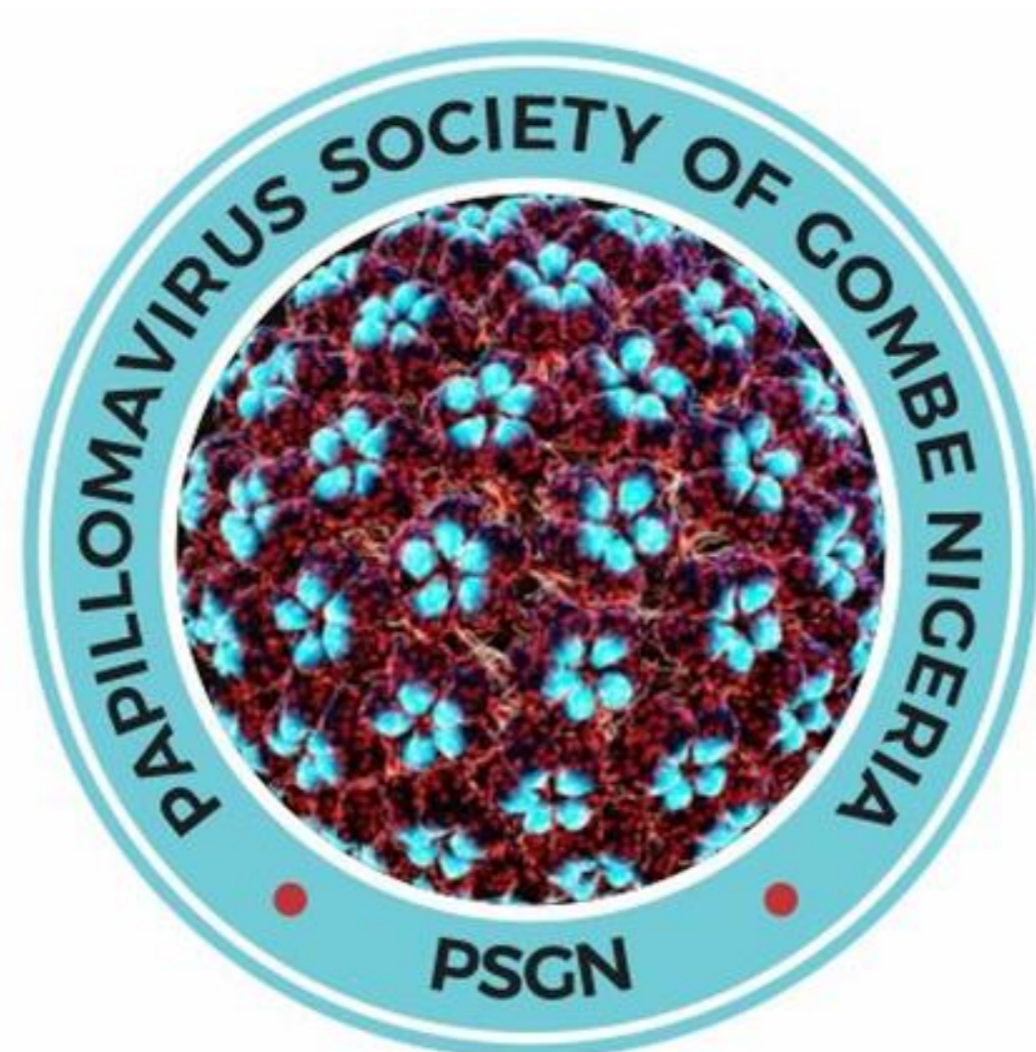
Methods

The exercise was conducted in Gombe Nigeria on the 19th of May 2024, a week to the flag-off of the HPVv in the state. Thirteen senior Islamic scholars who are “Imams” from diverse ideological perspectives were invited. Relevant public health experts anchored the session. Seven questions on status and perspectives of Islam and Muslims and on Immunization and HPV vaccine were used as guides. All scholars took time to air their views and provided recommendations. The Islamic stand on immunization was emphasized, remote and immediate causes of misconceptions were identified, and correctional approaches highlighted.

Results:

There was a consensus that Islam allows immunization, which could sometimes be compulsory. Some identified drivers of misinformation and misconception about immunization by the scholars include lack of trust, weak mutual respect, and poor communication from the scientific world / authorities. Other reasons include disharmony among health professionals, general anger due to poor governance, bad attitude/incompetence of some healthcare workers, inadequate pre-vaccine education/awareness and suspicion on western interventions. At the end of the discussions, all except one of the scholars have understood and were ready to convince their followers to accept the HPV vaccine.

Gombe State University



Stages adopted in Conducting the Focus Group Discussion



Cross section of the participants during and after the FGD

Conclusion

Timely and appropriate involvement of religious scholars before any health intervention including immunization activities is necessary in ensuring success particularly in northern Nigeria. Islam allows and encourage immunization including the HPV vaccine. However, poor communication/dialogue with religious scholars, mistrust and faulty mutual respect are the major identified weak points in understanding and acceptability of immunizations generally.



COALITION to STRENGTHEN the HPV IMMUNIZATION COMMUNITY

Advancing Sustainable HPV Vaccination Programs in Africa
1st, 2nd and 3rd October 2025 – Hosted in Nairobi, Kenya



Email: drmmanga@gmail.com; drmmanga@gsu.edu.ng;
Phone: +2348036781726

Acknowledgement: We sincerely appreciate all the religious scholars who volunteered to take part in the study and subsequent interventions. We are equally grateful to the Vice Chancellor of Gombe State University and the Gombe State Honourable Commissioner for Health for their presence and support. We also appreciate MSD for supporting the 2024 International HPV Awareness Day (IHAD) in Gombe which has this activity as a component.

Dialogue avec des érudits religieux islamiques pour améliorer la sensibilisation au vaccin HPV dans le nord du Nigeria

Auteurs : Mohammed M. Manga, Rasheed Abdulganiy, Umar Mohammed Hassan, Halima Usman Farouk, Danladi Adamu Bojude, Yahaya Mohammed, Abdulshaheed Bello, Aliyu Usman El-Nafaty, Marc Steben

Affiliations : Université d'État de Gombe/Hôpital d'enseignement fédéral et Papillomavirus Society, Gombe (Nigeria) ; Université Usmanu Danfodiyo, Sokoto (Nigeria) ; Canadian Network for HPV Prevention et International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS), Genève (Suisse).

Résumé détaillé :

Le Nigeria a introduit le vaccin HPV en 2023-2024. Historiquement, des activités antivaccination ont été menées par certains érudits islamiques, qui jouent pourtant un rôle crucial dans l'acceptation des immunisations au nord du pays. Leurs perspectives étant peu documentées, une discussion de groupe focalisée a été organisée à Gombe le 19 mai 2024, une semaine avant le lancement de la campagne de vaccination. Treize imams de divers courants ont participé à cette séance animée par des experts en santé publique ; sept questions portant sur l'islam et l'immunisation, et spécifiquement sur le vaccin HPV, ont guidé le débat.

Il est ressorti un consensus selon lequel l'islam autorise, voire rend obligatoire la vaccination. Les facteurs de désinformation identifiés incluent le manque de confiance, une relation parfois distante entre scientifiques et religieux, la discorde parmi les professionnels de santé, la colère liée à la mauvaise gouvernance, l'incompétence de certains agents de santé et l'absence d'éducation préalable au vaccin. Les participants ont également évoqué la suspicion envers les interventions occidentales et les lacunes de communication comme sources de malentendus. À l'issue des échanges, tous les érudits sauf un se sont dits prêts à convaincre leurs fidèles d'accepter le vaccin. La discussion a souligné la nécessité d'impliquer les leaders religieux dès le début de toute intervention de santé, d'améliorer la communication et de renforcer le respect mutuel pour combattre les rumeurs. Les auteurs concluent que l'implication en temps opportun des érudits religieux est essentielle pour le succès des programmes d'immunisation dans le nord du Nigeria ; l'islam soutient la vaccination, mais la confiance et le dialogue doivent être renforcés.

Cette traduction a été réalisée avec l'aide d'une IA. Merci de signaler toute inexactitude aux organisateurs afin que nous puissions la corriger rapidement, ou à l'adresse suivante : CHIC-SPC.secretariat@uantwerpen.be.