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COMMUNITY-BASED HIV TESTING IN A GAY SOCIAL VENUE IN LISBON

R. Fuertes (Clin. Psych); J. Brito (Peer Counsellor);
M.J. Campos (MD); J. Esteves (Peer Counsellor);
I. Coelho (RN)

GAT

Grupo Português de Activistas
sobre Tratamentos de VIH/SIDA
Pedro Santos

Lisbon - Portugal



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BACKGROUND

In various European cities, the GLBT community runs successful sexual health programs that refer people to the National Health Services in an effective way. The Portuguese HIV epidemic is the second largest in the European Union after Estonia and MSM transmission is now the largest driver of the epidemic. Limited evidence on the size of the epidemic among MSM suggests that HIV surveillance needs to focus on this group and embrace innovative tools beyond case reporting. This pilot project targets men who have sex with men (MSM) and aims to improve the access of this population to sexual health services by offering free and anonymous rapid HIV testing and peer-to-peer counselling in a community setting.



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METHODS

Literature review and data from qualitative interviews with the study participants were analysed. Data collection was done with a standardised questionnaire and a HIV rapid test (Hexagon HIV 1/2) was performed in a gay bar outside opening hours, from September to December 2010, 3 times a week, 2 hour/day. The services were promoted in outdoor cruising areas, saunas, bars and cultural events.



Testing was performed in a gay bar



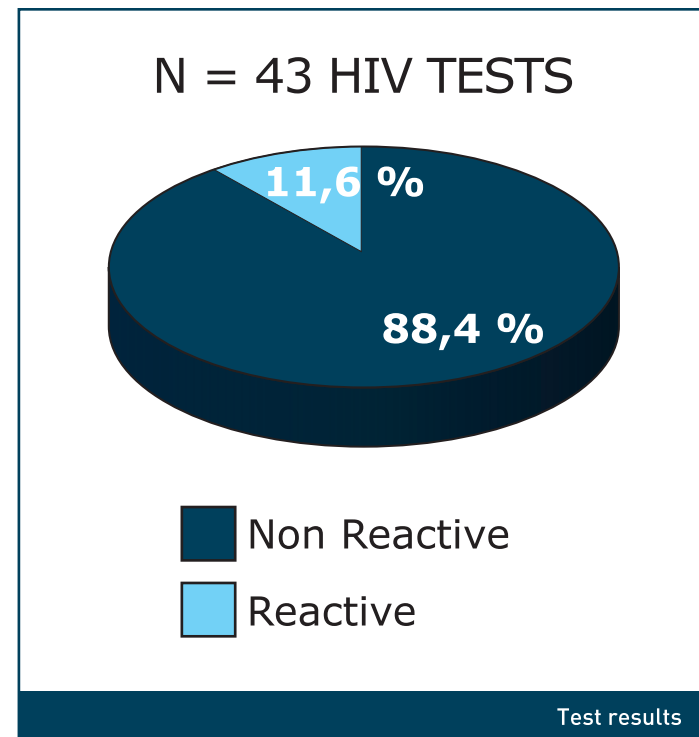
Promotion flyer



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RESULTS

A total of 43 men were tested and 30 questionnaires were obtained. The median age of the contacts was 32 years old, range 19-73 years, all self-identified as MSM. Five men had a reactive test (11,6%) and were referred to a local HIV-treating hospital. Four out of these five men self-identified as sex workers.





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CONCLUSION

This pilot indicates that peer-to-peer HIV testing and counselling in the Lisbon MSM community is a feasible approach to reach this population at high risk for HIV infection and should be expanded. Promotion of testing in different settings (including beaches, parks and other cruising areas) reached diverse sub-groups of MSM.