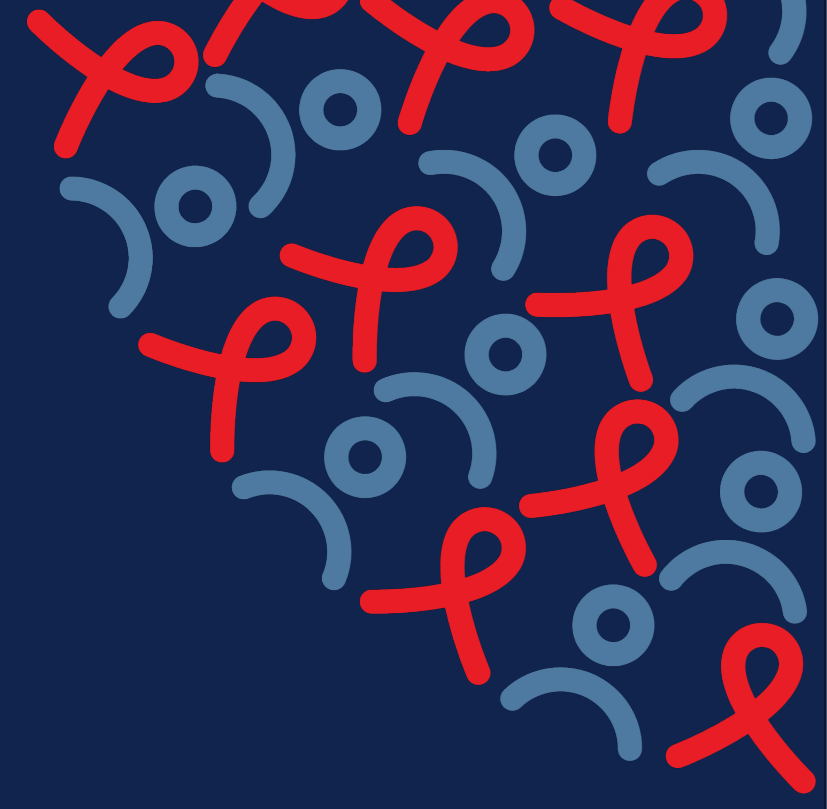


RAST enables targeted testing for sustained HIV case finding among MSM in Lesotho

EPD057

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BACKGROUND

As HIV programs mature, implementers increase their efforts to find undiagnosed individuals living with HIV. A recent shift from universal to targeted testing has challenged implementers to improve risk identification and segmentation in programs for men who have sex with men (MSM) and increase the use of data to differentiate and prioritize individuals for HIV testing and other prevention services.



Photo credit: Phelisanang Bophelong staff

Phelisanang Bophelong staff conduct outreach at Heoheng Community Council.

METHODS

The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) Lesotho project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and led by FHI 360, developed a risk assessment screening tool (RAST) to identify risks using several variables: time since last HIV test, incorrect condom use/condom unavailable during sex, insertive/receptive sex with incorrect condom use, pre-exposure prophylaxis use, sexually transmitted infection symptoms, medical circumcision status,

and intergenerational sex (Figure 1). For each variable, response values were set to high, medium, or low risk. High, medium, and low values were totaled to determine an individual's risk category and testing priority. The RAST was piloted in three districts from February to March 2020 to validate the segmented risk. The RAST was then rolled out for routine programmatic use in April 2020 to further assess the validity of risk segmentation among MSM. We present results of the first 10 months of RAST implementation (April 2020–January 2021).

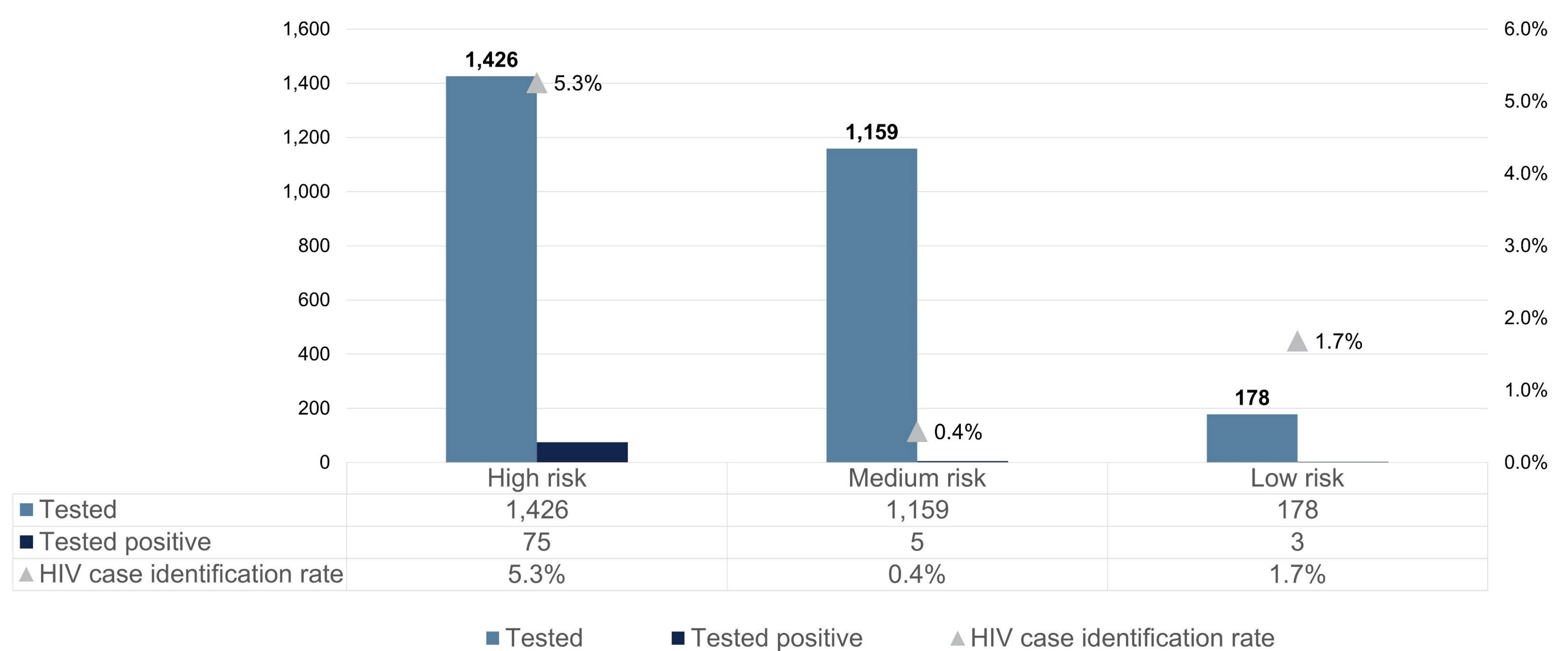
FIGURE 1. Variables used for HIV risk assessment



RESULTS

The RAST was used to screen and categorize for HIV risk 2,780 MSM eligible for testing, with 52% (1,434) categorized as high risk, 42% (1,165) as medium, and 6% (181) as low (Figure 2). Fourteen MSM did not accept an HIV test, eight from the high-risk category and six from the medium-risk category. The HIV case-finding rate was 5.2% (75/1,434) in the high-risk category, 0.4% (5/1,165) in the medium, and 1.7% (3/181) in the low (p<0.001). MSM segmented as high risk had 3.3 times the odds of testing positive compared to those in the low-risk category (p=0.045).

FIGURE 2. Number of MSM tested and case-finding rate by risk categories



CONCLUSIONS

Using the RAST enhances the client-centered approach and allows programs to successfully segment and intensify targeted HIV testing for those at elevated risk of exposure, facilitating more efficient use of peer outreach workers' time and efforts. Lesotho will intensify work to reach and prioritize high-risk MSM for testing, allow medium- and low-risk individuals to opt out of testing, and institute a yearly HIV testing screening algorithm to test all MSM who use services.



Photo credit: The People's Matrix staff

The People's Matrix staff launch peer outreach at Mazenod Community Council.

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