



Invisible Victims: Addressing the Sexual and Health Consequences of Stealth Breeding for Brazilian Gay Men

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ABSTRACT

Stealth breeding is the act in which a man removes a condom during sexual intercourse without the consent of the male partner. This paper explores the context of stealth breeding among gay men in Brazil. Through in-depth interviews with ten gay men who have experienced stealthing, this study highlights its sexual and mental health consequences. The participants, aged 21–49, reside in urban areas of Brazil. Using thematic analysis, the results indicate the dynamics and consequences of stealth breeding, including the decision to seek post-exposure prophylaxis the following day, the reporting of sexually transmitted infections and HIV, the emergence of mental health concerns, and the lack of support from professionals and institutions. This phenomenon has resulted in a significant gap in scientific, legal, and social awareness, which requires urgent attention at the national and global levels. Understanding stealth breeding would assist in the development of preventive strategies, particularly among gay men, thus meriting increased clinical and research attention.

KEYWORDS

Stealth breeding; sexual violence; sexual health; consent; gay

Introduction

The term “stealthing” describes the act of a male partner removing a condom during sexual intercourse without the consent or knowledge of their female partner, thereby breaching the previously established agreement (Brodsky, 2017). The same phenomenon has been referred to as “stealth breeding” in sexual relations between men (Brennan, 2017). Both authors argue that stealthing and stealth breeding are forms of sexual violence.

It is crucial to distinguish between stealth breeding and the practice of barebacking, considering that the lack of empirical and theoretical research dedicated to stealth breeding can perhaps be explained by the gray area of “consent” dimensions (Brennan, 2017). Barebacking is defined as sexual intercourse in which the participants consent to refrain

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from using condoms (Bezerra & Giacomini, 2019). Also, it is worth recalling the terms “bug chasing” and “gift-giving.” Both terms describe sexual practices in which human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection is intentionally and knowingly sought by those involved, with the knowledge and consent of their partners (Klein, 2014). Differently, stealth breeding represents a unilateral violation of the agreement established by the partners at the time of sexual intercourse, given when one of them is unaware of the condom removal (Nunes & Lehfeld, 2018). In other words, the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can occur in stealth breeding, but this condition does not define the term. Stealth breeding is based on a significant distinction between the other two phenomena: the absence of consent to condom use.

The term is relatively recent and has been infrequently discussed in academic literature. Notably, it has yet to be translated into non-English languages (Ferrari, Nascimento, et al, 2024). American lawyer Alexandra Brodsky is regarded as the pioneer of these studies, having drawn attention to the existence of groups and communities on online platforms in which men who remove condoms without consent share information on how to remove them during sexual intercourse without the woman’s agreement (Brodsky, 2017). In the context of studies involving heterosexual partnerships, Brazilian authors (Cabette & Cunha, 2017; Muniz, 2020; Nunes & Lehfeld, 2018; Soares, 2017) argue that the act constitutes an affront to people’s fundamental rights and assert that removing condoms without consent represents a form of sexual and gender-based violence.

While debates surrounding stealthing in heterosexual relationships are relevant, there is a paucity of international studies that examine the practice in homosexual relationships (Brennan, 2017; G. Costa et al., 2022; Daroya, 2022; Ferrari et al., 2021, 2025; Latimer et al., 2018; Webber et al., 2024). In the initial international studies, Brennan (2017) demonstrated through a textual analysis of discourse on online platforms in Australia that the act of condom removal is also prevalent in relationships between men. Additionally, the study highlighted that men who have sex with men (MSM) also disseminate information on digital platforms regarding the removal of condoms without the partner’s awareness. In many cases, the penetrating partner is the one who removes the condom. However, the penetrated partner may pierce the condom to receive the active partner’s semen without prior consent. In a further study involving 1,063 MSM, conducted at a sexual health center in Melbourne, Australia, 19% of participants reported having been victims of stealth breeding. Nevertheless, only one-third of the men surveyed flagged this practice as sexual violence (Latimer et al., 2018).

Also, in Australia, Daroya (2022) explores how gay, bisexual, and queer men discuss stealth breeding in a barebacking online forum. As a result, gay, bisexual, and queer men negotiate that stealth breeding can be moral

acceptability for others, especially in anonymous sexual spaces, shaping articulations of sexual consent and stealth breeding.

In Brazil, G. Costa et al. (2022) conducted a survey that included 380 college students of both sexes in São Paulo, revealing an overall prevalence of 11.3% among those who self-identified as victims of condom removal without consent. Of these individuals, 93% identified as heterosexual women, while 7% identified as gay men. In a qualitative study, Ferrari et al. (2021) examined the sexual trajectories of 15 young cisgender gay men from the working classes of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. From an intersectional perspective, the authors illustrate that their trajectories are pervaded by diverse forms of violence, including stealth breeding.

Ferrari et al. (2025) published the first nationwide survey on stealth breeding in Brazil. A total of 601 gay male victims of stealth breeding responded to an online questionnaire. The data indicate that the typical victim is a man who engages in various activities, including education, employment, and family life. Most of the participants were victims of stealth breeding during youth and met their partners on apps. The authors concluded that stealth breeding is notable in Brazil among gay men, which should generate more discussions about sexual violence among gay men to reduce the overall societal stigma against gay men that prevents them from seeking help and support after an episode of sexual violence, such as stealth breeding.

From a legal standpoint, there is a notable absence of legislation at the State or federal level that explicitly addresses this practice in Brazil. Notwithstanding, Bill 965/2022 was endorsed in September 2023 by the Constitution and Justice and Citizenship Commission (CCJJ), which provides for incorporating the offense into the Penal Code with a penalty of up to four years imprisonment for those who perpetrate it. Additionally, the objective of the bill is to establish a uniform legal framework for the treatment of abortions resulting from sexual crimes, thereby benefiting those convicted under current legislation (Brasil, 2022). Moreover, the bill characterizes this practice as “an act of domestic and family violence against women,” yet it does not acknowledge that it can also affect men. It is evident that the subject is underrepresented in Brazilian academic and legal literature and is largely absent from any discussion of the phenomenon in the context of relationships between men.

In this scenario, this paper aims to reflect on the phenomenon of stealth breeding in the context of sexual violence among men who have sex with men. To this end, it presents a characterization and analysis of the practice among ten gay men victims of stealth breeding, considering the context in which it occurs, the meanings attributed to it by those who experienced it, the consequences it has on the lives of victims, and the consequences for the search for public services and biomedical methods of HIV prevention.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques, to elucidate the practice of stealth breeding and to comprehend the perceptions of cis-gay men regarding their experiences of violence and the ramifications thereof on their health. The quantitative stage comprised an online survey of cis-gay men from all five regions of Brazil, irrespective of their geographical location, socioeconomic status, age, sexual orientation, educational background, ethnicity/race. The survey yielded a sample size of 601 gay cis men, all victims of stealth breeding. The recruitment strategy entailed disseminating information via e-mail to members of public and private universities, feminist institutions, and health professionals to request their assistance in disseminating the research findings on their respective social networks and through institutional announcements (Ferrari et al., 2025).

The second part was in-depth qualitative research. The latter refers to the aim of this article. Ten men who had experienced stealth breeding and had completed the online questionnaire mentioned above were interviewed. They left their contact details (e-mail and personal telephone number) and were contacted about the possibility of participating in the qualitative interview. The interviews were held from September 2023 to February 2024. The interviews were held virtually and in Portuguese language by the first author. The article was translated by a certified professional, considering the effects on data accuracy and authenticity, rapport-building, and the construction of shared understanding. The Research Ethics Committee of the Fernandes Figueira Institute (IFF-Fiocruz) approved the qualitative research.

Participants and procedures

The qualitative stage of this study, which represents the analysis undertaken in this article, was conducted using the in-depth interview technique. The interviews were conducted with ten cisgender gay men who had previously experienced stealth breeding and who had participated in the online survey. Contact information was obtained from participants via e-mail and telephone during the quantitative stage. Subsequently, these individuals were contacted to ascertain their willingness to participate in interviews at the subsequent stage of the research.

The second stage of the recruitment process was conducted between September 2023 and March 2024. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide; the primary objective was to ascertain the meanings ascribed to stealth breeding by the victims, the context of the intimate relationship, and the networks activated after the victims' experience of such an act. The mean duration of the interviews was 1:15 hours. The

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the interviewees*.

Name, Age	Ethnicity/race	Religion	Sexual Orientation	Region	Minimum Wage Income
Marcelo, 35	White	Catholicism	Gay	Midwest	7
Leandro, 28	White	Catholicism	Gay	Southeast	2
Gustavo, 33	White	Atheism	Gay	Midwest	25
Afonso, 23	Brown	None	Gay	Southeast	3
Marco, 42	White	Catholicism	Gay	Southeast	12
Eduardo, 27	Black	Candomblé	Gay	Northeast	4
Vitor, 49	Brown	Atheism	Gay	South	14
Carlos, 21	Black	Umbanda	Gay	North	3
José, 32	White	Atheism	Gay	South	6
Ricardo, 30	Black	Catholicism	Gay	Northeast	5

N = 10. *Self-declared.

interviews were classified according to the thematic analysis proposed by Braun et al. (2016). This approach facilitated the study of the discourses, enabling the identification of each participant's specific characteristics.

As indicated in Table 1, the age range of the ten interviewees was between 21 and 49 years. Four interviewees were aged between 21–8, four between 30 and 35, and two between 42 and 49. Regarding race/color, five respondents identified as White, three as Black, and two as Brown. All respondents identified as gay and cisgender. Regarding religious affiliation, four individuals identified as Catholics, three as atheists, and one as having no religious affiliation. One participant self-identified as a member of Umbanda, and another as a member of Candomblé. Both religions, Umbanda and Candomblé, emerged in Brazil during the 1920s, and they came from Afro-Brazilian traditions (Cumino, 2011).

Regarding geographical origin, three interviewees were from the Southeast, two from the Northeast, two from the Center-West, two from the South, and one from the North, covering all five regions of the country. Regarding income relative to the minimum wage, four individuals reported a revenue of between two and four times the minimum wage, three reported an income of between five and seven times the minimum wage, and three reported an income of more than 12 times the minimum wage.

Results

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed the following themes for discussion of how stealth breeding occurred in the interviewees' trajectories and the self-perceived consequences of the act on their sexual and mental health: 1) The Perception of the Violation of Consent: Gender Dynamics Among Gay Men; 2) Partner Status, Meeting-Up, Age Difference and Top/Bottom Relations: Dynamics of Power? 3) Post-Stealth Breeding: The Search For PEP And The Challenges To Deal With Institutional Violence; 4) Consequences for Health: STIs and HIV and mental issues.

The perception of the violation of consent: Gender dynamics among gay men

All participants indicated their consent to the use of condoms with their partners before engaging in sexual intercourse. In some cases, however, it was reported that the condom was already in use by the partner and, therefore, not a topic of discussion. They mentioned the difficulty of seeing themselves in the place of victims of sexual violence and bring essential components to the discussion of gender relational dynamics between people of the same sex:

I saw him put it on [the condom], and at no point did he express any objection. During the intercourse, I noticed that he had not put it on. I did not say a word at the time; I was speechless. It is not a scenario that one anticipates. I thought such incidents only affected women from the slums. I had not weighed the possibility that I, as a man, could be the victim of violence at the age of 18 at the hands of a stranger. (Carlos, aged 21)

I asked him to put the condom on and I came to realize at some point that we were having sex without it, and I continued the sex, anyway. At the time, I could not see that I was being a victim of stealth breeding. I only really understood it years later when I saw an article about it. That is when I pictured myself as a victim of it!. (Eduardo, aged 27)

Partner status, meeting-up, age difference and top/bottom relations: Dynamics of power?

As illustrated in Table 2, nine of the ten interviewed indicated that the sexual relationship was “episodic.” Of these respondents, seven reported meeting their partner through *Grindr*, a geo-location App initially developed in 2009 with a primary focus on facilitating sexual encounters among gay men and MSM (Europe & Fotache, 2022). Additionally, nine respondents identified as

Table 2. Experiences of stealth-breeding.

Name, Age	Age at Stealthing	Partners Age	Relationship Status	Discovery	STIs	Seek for Medication	Meeting Environment
Marcelo, aged 35	33	39	Episodic intercourse	Right away	None	PEP	At a club
Leandro, aged 28	24	32	Episodic intercourse	Right away	Gonorrhea Chlamydia	PEP	Using Grindr
Gustavo, aged 33	25	35	Episodic intercourse	Right away	None	PEP	Using Grindr
Anderson, aged 23	17	28	Episodic intercourse	Right away	None	PEP	Using Grindr
Marco, aged 42	37	29	Episodic intercourse	Right away	Syphilis	PEP	Using Grindr
Eduardo, aged 27	21	30	Episodic intercourse	Right away	None	PEP	Using Grindr
Vitor, aged 49	44	41	Formal, boyfriend	Right away	None	None	Friends in common
Carlos, aged 21	18	32	Episodic intercourse	Post intercourse	Syphilis	None	At a club
José, aged 32	24	35	Episodic intercourse	Right away	HIV	None	Using Grindr
Ricardo, aged 30	26	34	Episodic intercourse	Right away	None	PEP	Using Grindr

N = 10

victims of stealth breeding perpetrated by older partners. Of the ten interviews, the average age of the victims was 26.9 years, while the average age of the partners was 33.5 years. Still, all the victims identified their sexual role as bottoms (receivers):

I was surfing *Grindr* at college when I got chatting to a guy who was walking by. We arranged to meet just to have sex once, it was just a hookup. But then he took the condom off in the middle of it. It was awful! I did nothing because he was bigger than me and more manly. Then he blocked me. I do not know his name, his age, where he lives, or anything. I will never discover who he is. (Leandro, aged 24 and partner 32 at time stealth breeding happened)

We met on *Grindr*, arranged to meet for the first time. I am only bottom and I did not see that he removed the condom without my seeing. So, the very next day, I used *Grindr* to ask the guy if he was HIV positive. Can you believe he blocked me after we met online? He blocked me!. (Gustavo, aged 35 and partner 35 at time stealth breeding happened)

Post-stealth breeding: The search for PEP and the challenges to deal with institutional violence

As illustrated in [Table 2](#), seven interviewees sought PEP after a stealth breeding experience. Of the seven individuals, five were aware of the availability of prophylaxis, while two sought information online regarding potential courses of action following unprotected sexual intercourse. Moreover, nine men had not discussed with their partner the possibility of seeking prophylaxis; the search for PEP was conducted independently, without the involvement or input of the partner in question.

In essence, PEP represents a secondary prevention measure, comprising the administration of medication to reduce the risk of infection in situations of potential exposure to HIV. Initially, the medication was made available in the Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde—SUS*, from Portuguese) for cases of occupational accidents and victims of violence. It was not until 2011 that it was extended to include individuals who had experienced consensual sexual exposure (Brasil, 2018). Ultimately, when methods have been exhausted or not employed, such as condom breaks or absence of condom use, this usually represents a pivotal point of reference for risk perception and the subsequent decision to pursue PEP (Mathias et al., 2021). For those who sought PEP, reports of institutional violence were present in all interviews, demarcating speeches of homophobia and stigmatization on the part of health professionals:

I went to the polyclinic, and it was a pretty bad experience. The nurses asked if I was an MSM. One said, “*They are the people who do not have a steady partner and go out into the world.*” She came up with questions in a way that made it seem like she was mocking me. She asked if I was irresponsible and had unprotected sex. She also asked if I used to be the

woman in the relationship. When I told her I was a student at the Federal University, she said, *'I do not get it. You have information, yet you are here.'* It was a frightening and humiliating experience! Then the person who gave me the pills said that I must now learn my lesson. It was pretty overwhelming for me. (Leandro, aged 28)

The service was poor. The nurses kept asking tons of questions in a kind of mocking tone. They questioned if I had had sex with a man or a woman. When I replied it was with a man, one of them mumbled, "It had to be, didn't it?" They said I was irresponsible and that's why I was there. They also said that only gay people would look for medication after they had gone partying. She did not know anything about my personal situation or the reason why I was there. I was so sick, so stressed, and so fragile that I did not even bother to tell my story. (Afonso, aged 23)

Another setting in which an interviewee who had been the victim of stealth breeding sought assistance was the police station to report the act of sexual violence that they had been suffering. His testimony also sheds light on instances of homophobia and the lack of preparedness on the part of police stations to accommodate individuals who deviate from the heterosexual norm:

I felt so uncomfortable with the situation that I thought I should report it to the police. It was a rough experience. I got there feeling down. There were two guys at the police station. I explained the whole situation, and they just started laughing at me. One of them said that the police station for violence against women wasn't there, in a joking manner. The other guy said you don't get involved in a fight between a husband and wife. They kept suggesting that I was the woman in the situation. I thought I'd leave, but I said I wanted to file a police report. I kept repeating it, but they just kept laughing. Several things were missing from the police report that they didn't put in. I even threw the police report in the trash can because I was so discouraged and sad. (Eduardo, aged 27)

Consequences for health: STIs and HIV and mental issues

For last, after the stealth breeding, the interviewees underwent testing for STIs. This was either to confirm the negative HIV result following the administration of PEP or because some unusual symptoms had manifested. Five men were diagnosed with STIs, including syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and HIV:

After a few weeks, I started experiencing symptoms I had never felt before in my life, which was scary. I began to feel desperate. Then, I went to a specialist STI center. I explained the situation and was diagnosed with gonorrhea and chlamydia. (Leandro, aged 28)

After a few weeks, I noticed several spots on my penis. I took the syphilis test, and it was positive. My world fell apart at that moment. I'm sure I got it from him. I had to wait a few more weeks to take an HIV test. I entered an anxiety that I had never experienced. It was horrible because I experienced a situation I didn't even choose. (Marco, aged 42)

After nine months, I started to feel a bit under the weather with a fever, body aches, and diarrhea. I was too weak to go to the gym, so I decided to take an HIV test, which came

back positive. It took me a few months to get my head around everything and to start taking the medication. It felt like my whole world had fallen apart when I found out. I am still dealing with that today. (José, aged 32)

Also, all of them discussed the ramifications of stealth breeding on the mental health of the interviewees. Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which the individual develops personal skills, demonstrates resilience in the face of life's challenges, and contributes to the betterment of society. Mental health is a state that encompasses more than the mere absence of mental illness (World Health Organization [WHO], 2004). The following reports delve into examples:

It all led to some traumatic experiences. I think it affected my self-esteem and my confidence in myself. I even wondered whether I would let someone do that to me again. It can also lead to a loss of trust in others. It took me a while to be ready to have sex again, to trust people, to enjoy it. I had trouble finishing my master's degree, going out, smiling, flirting. I remember losing weight at the time and blaming myself all the time because I had let the guy do this to me. It takes a long time to rebuild and move on with your life because you cannot forget. (Afonso, aged 23)

It was more than just the insomnia, the anxiolytics, and the visits to the psychiatrist and the psychologist. It went beyond having to take medication every day and remember what happened to me. I had to remember that it was not my choice and that it was not with my permission. I must remember that every day. I was never the same after that episode. I felt violated, disrespected, and humiliated, as if my body was nothing. It wrenches my relationships, especially my ability to say "no" to someone. I stopped going to college, I considered taking my own life, and I did not want to talk about it with anyone. It took me two years to have sex again. It is tough to find meaning in life after such violence. (José, aged 32)

It took me years to have sex with another person again. I did not trust anyone else anymore. I did not even trust myself anymore. All my friends said I was different, but my parents were the same. I stopped going to the gym and lost 5 kilograms. I felt so guilty and blamed me for what happened to me. It took months of therapy to realize that it was not my choice. I do not think I was the same person after this (Gustavo, aged 33).

Discussion

Carlos' discourse presents a series of thought-provoking topics for discussion and analysis in the first theme. Some interviewees perceived themselves as victims of violence during sexual intercourse, notably when they observed the absence of a condom. Others, like Eduardo, despite acknowledging that the condom had been removed without consent, did not perceive themselves as victims at the time of intercourse. Instead, they viewed themselves as victims only after the act had concluded. It can take months or years for individuals to admit that stealth breeding constitutes sexual violence against their bodies.

The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to consummate a sexual act, or unwanted sexual innuendo; or actions to commercialize or otherwise use a person’s sexuality through coercion by another person, regardless of that person’s relationship to the victim” (WHO, 2018, p. 84). In this context, we assert that sexual violence occurs when a victim lacks consent to remove a condom, resulting in stealth breeding.

Consent here is taken as a crucial term to understand the seriousness of stealth breeding among gay men. Beres et al. (2004) discusses that we often hypothesized that literature on GBTQ men specifically discusses consent nuancedly and pushes against the miscommunication framing, linking to punitive and skills-based solutions, perhaps lending instead to anti-carceral and ethics-based solutions.

In this context, this debate shows how we should examine how individuals of different gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations navigate sexual consent. It influences how sexual violence and harm are addressed socially, politically, and legally (Webber et al., 2024). Consent goes beyond the legal debate, linking it to the scope of sexual relationships and sexual rights. The right to sexual health and care is essential in all political, economic, and cultural systems, emphasizing the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences free from coercion, discrimination, or violence (Daroya, 2022). In the field of sexuality, when the border between giving in and consenting is crossed, there is violence. Consent is identified as the opposite of violence. Sexual violence arises when consent is violated (Leguil, 2021).

The failure of some interviewees to notice the occurrence of sexual violence during sexual intercourse may be attributed to the continued prevalence of a dichotomous conceptualization of violence, whereby physical and sexual violence are viewed as distinct and separate forms of violence (Brasil, 2018). As the participants consented to sexual intercourse but did not consent to the removal of the condom, there is a porosity of consent (Daroya, 2022; Fernandes et al., 2020), which delineates a specific boundary in a sexual act that is consented to by both parties.

Moreover, Carlos’ quote illustrates the difficulty men face in acknowledging themselves as victims of sexual violence, prevailing the perception that only women can be victims of sexual violence. The absence of clear frameworks and discussions about how men can be victims of sexual violence, demonstrates the vulnerability of a man to confront his “masculine honor” and to recognize the sexual violence (Coêlho et al., 2018).

J. V. H. Hohendorff et al. (2012) contend that it is not possible to conclude that sexual violence against men is a lesser problem than that experienced by women, given the significant obstacles to reporting sexual violence experienced by men, which are ultimately sustained by the macho culture that reproduces the invisibility of sexual violence among men (Sarti et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the dearth of representative data on men in the general population, coupled with the issue of underreporting, suggests that certain groups may be more vulnerable to sexual violence. For instance, studies have demonstrated that MSM and homosexual individuals may be at an elevated risk of experiencing such forms of violence (Spizzirri et al., 2022). These discussions highlight the necessity of examining the coercive consequences of power dynamics, demonstrating that the relationship between two men can be markedly asymmetrical and susceptible to sexual violence (Ferrari et al., 2021).

Regarding the second theme, it is well documented that interpersonal relationships mediated by the Internet are becoming increasingly prevalent nowadays, particularly among younger people (Canezin & Almeida, 2015). In the case of the interviewees, who identify as dissidents from the heterosexual norm, it can be posited that geolocation apps, particularly Grindr, provide a certain degree of anonymity. This is because most users on this platform do not display their faces in their profile photos, which has led to the term “faceless men” being coined (Fragoso, 2018).

As posited by Tavares et al. (2022), Grindr is seen as a platform that can be used in various ways, and not all users engage in risky behaviors. However, in their research, the risky sexual behavior exhibited by users of gay dating apps is more likely to involve violence, such as a lack of negotiation regarding condom use, compared to non-internet-mediated meetings. The authors show how essential it is to engage in a critical and non-moralizing reflection on the utilization of geolocation apps for sexual encounters. Such reflection should encompass an examination of the potential for violence and its implications for sexual and mental health, in addition to an evaluation of the capacity of these media to assist in the reduction of associated risks and harms (Gonçalves et al., 2019; Ferrari, Nogueira et al., 2024).

Indeed, the Internet can serve as a valuable resource and a vital conduit for communication and support on matters of sexual behavior among gay men and MSM, including HIV and the utilization of PEP. As Santos et al. (2022) have observed, the involvement of traditional health institutions—health services, government agencies, and so forth—is a significant factor in this context. Nevertheless, disseminating content related to PrEP and PEP is becoming less prevalent in young people’s social networks. A considerable proportion of young gay men rely on digital influencers, many of whom are medical professionals, for information on PEP and sexual health, particularly on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

In a related matter, most respondents classified their partner as belonging to the category of “episodic sexual relationships.” This designation signifies that the encounter in question was characterized by a lack of commitment and a singular objective: the act of sexual intercourse. In approaching relationships between men, Souza de (2023) demonstrate that the probability of experiencing violence in episodic relationships is more significant than in those that are

longer-lasting. The authors further explain that violence in relationships between intimate partners can occur in a relationship between two men as well as in a single sexual encounter.

Domingues' research (2015) indicates that gay men are capable of perpetrating sexual violence within the context of intimacy, a phenomenon associated with gender stereotypes that may impose particular masculinity on men, which is often idealized using violence. In most cases, the perpetrator of violence is the "top" partner, defined as the individual who penetrates the other partner. Notably, men seldom report having been victims of sexual violence, which contributes to a prevailing taboo surrounding the topic of sexual violence experienced by men (J. V. Hohendorff et al., 2015).

In this study, all interviewees identified themselves as bottoms in sexual roles. In a seminal work published over four decades ago, Misse (1979) proposed that penetration has historically been perceived as exclusive to men. Consequently, individuals engaged in such acts were often positioned as the "man in the relationship (i.e., the top)." In contrast, the individual who is penetrated is taken as the "woman of the relationship (i.e., the bottom)." The author mapped a hierarchy between two men, whereby the terms "top" and "bottom" assume distinct positions.

It is essential to highlight that this binary division between top and bottom does not account for the diversity of possibilities in a sexual relationship between two men. The idea of virility associated with the top and femininity associated with the bottom does not consider that gender expressions can be diverse and escape from this binarism (Nguyen, 2014). However, studies (Hammack et al., 2022; Saraiva et al., 2020) show that in the context of interactions on apps like Grindr, the expression of virility is valuable, while expressions considered feminine are less valued, reinforcing stereotypes. Gender dynamics reveal an intertwined dynamic of power and hierarchies in relationships between men, which can lead to situations of vulnerability in sexual intercourse.

Even among homosexual males, bottoms are still positioned at a lower level of this hierarchy. Such terminology facilitates the establishment of a discernible ideology of domination and submission, thereby engendering a hierarchical relationship between those who penetrate and those who are penetrated. In this context, the "top" position indicates a dominant role, whereas the "bottom" position is associated with a submissive role. This dynamic may contribute to the formation of hierarchies and present challenges in negotiating condom use (Cecchetto, 2004). This can render the bottom "the vulnerable among the vulnerable" (A. H. C. Costa & Gonçalves, 2021).

As seen in Table 2, there is also a considerable age difference between the partners, which may be a crucial factor in the hierarchy's failure to negotiate condom use. At the time of stealth breeding, the interviewees ranged in age

from 17 to 44, while their partners were between 28 and 41. The average age of those interviewed during the act was 26.9, while the average age of the perpetrator was 33.5. The average age of the partners is seven years apart.

Borges and Schor (2005) assert that an age disparity between partners can contribute to the occurrence of violence within sexual encounters. This discrepancy can potentially result in a diminished capacity for negotiation, agency, and autonomy on behalf of the younger partner concerning sexual intercourse, including their ability to negotiate the use of condoms. In addition to the way the partners initially interacted and the fact that their relationship was primarily characterized by intermittent sexual encounters, the age difference between the individuals involved represents a significant indicator for the examination of the vulnerabilities inherent to sexual interactions between cisgender gay male partners.

The episodic nature of the encounter, coupled with the manner of initial contact, the established power dynamics between those designated as top or bottom, and the age disparity between the involved parties, are crucial elements in comprehending the context of hierarchies and vulnerabilities that can emerge from a single sexual encounter. These factors illuminate crucial asymmetrical and power relations axes in diverse ways (Mathias et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2022). These differences may reiterate specific patterns of hegemonic masculinity and a hierarchical pattern of masculinity, domination, and binarism (Connell, 1995), seen by interviewees mainly in the active and passive binarism and when the partner is older and more masculine than the victim.

Regarding the third theme, institutional violence refers to any form of violence that occurs within the context of an institution, whether it is private or public, and is directed toward individuals regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race/color, or age. The most common forms of institutional violence include aggressive communication, insult, depreciation and humiliation, and the fostering of a hostile atmosphere (Faleiros, 2009). As evidenced in the reports, the attitudes and behaviors of professionals in the service are influenced by subjective, evaluative, and moral judgment, which ultimately shape how users and their reasons for seeking prophylaxis are perceived (Massa et al., 2021). Institutional homophobia affects LGB+ victims of abuse and violence. Stereotypes about being gay result in LGB+ people not being effectively protected from those who are supposed to harm them (Dovidio et al., 2010). These stealth-breeding victims show us that we still have a lot of new and old challenges to remove the structures that have allowed institutionalized discrimination to fester unchallenged for decades.

Consequently, continued obstacles exist regarding access to PEP, including discriminatory practices directed toward those who pursue it. Some authors (e.g., Maksud et al., 2015) emphasize the continued relevance of this prophylaxis strategy while also underscoring the necessity to address the persistence of moral judgment and stigma surrounding sexuality. In this context,

facilitating access to PEP by fostering dialogue and a welcoming environment is paramount. This approach encourages the integration of technical expertise with lived experiences, thereby recognizing individuals as rights-holders (Massa et al., 2021). To ensure the effective implementation of prevention strategies within healthcare services, it is essential to consider the individual perspectives of healthcare professionals and patients and the broader structural and organizational dimensions of the services themselves.

The violence perpetrated against members of the LGBTQIA+ community, as is the case with other minority social groups, can manifest in several ways, including the denial of rights, discrimination, and even the erasure of the group from institutional and social structures (Bulgarelli & Andrade Irineu, 2020). Eduardo's account exemplifies the presence of an institutional culture that is hostile toward the LGBTQIA+ community. The multifaceted nature of the issues about structural violence against this demographic group permits the discernment of pervasive institutional prejudice and nuanced forms of discrimination, which can even unfold in healthcare settings (Brasil, 2016).

Lastly, stealth breeding can result in the transmission of STIs. The extant literature indicates that individuals who have experienced sexual violence are approximately 50% more likely to contract STIs and HIV (UNAIDS, 2013). This increased vulnerability to health problems is a consequence of the heightened risk of exposure to STIs (Vertamatti et al., 2013). The specific sexual act that is performed during the act of violence is of fundamental importance. As indicated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the probability of HIV transmission during anal intercourse is approximately 50 per 10,000 (CDC, 2022).

In this context, it is crucial that after an episode of stealth breeding, the victims would make an admission to health care. Nevertheless, this measure should not impede or delay the commencement of prophylaxis, even in emergencies. Tests must be collected within the initial hours or days following the incident to differentiate between STIs resulting from sexual assault (Brasil, 2018). Furthermore, Brazilian criminal law stipulates an enhanced penalty of one-sixth to one-half for the perpetrator who transmits STIs in such circumstances (Vertamatti, 2013).

Victims of stealth breeding must also receive immediate attention to address potential physical injuries, psychological consequences, and STI prophylaxis. Implementing protective measures for victims is contingent upon establishing appropriate public policies, and it is incumbent upon emergency services personnel to provide comprehensive, empathetic care to support victims. It is, therefore, imperative that there be more significant debate and visibility regarding the rights of male victims of sexual violence.

As the interviewees mentioned, they are unaware of the necessity to seek out a specialized service for victims of violence. This should be done as soon as possible to prevent STI transmission, including HIV. The provision

of healthcare for men who have experienced sexual violence is a complex undertaking that necessitates the establishment of institutions and interdisciplinary teams with the qualifications to provide a wide range of services, including welcoming care, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation (Ferreira et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to furnish victims of stealth breeding with well-considered information regarding the potential ramifications of this experience on their sexual and mental health.

In the same context, stealth breeding affects the mental health of the victims and can produce forms of psychological violence and effects that extends beyond the boundaries of sexual violence. As defined by Signorini and Brandão (2004), psychological violence is characterized by the infliction of emotional distress upon an individual by emotional manipulation by the aggressor. This form of violence is particularly challenging to identify due to its lack of materiality on the victim's body (Sacramento & Rezende, 2006). After these psychological effects mentioned by the interviewers, stealth breeding constitutes both sexual and psychological violence, entailing the infringement of the most fundamental rights of the individual subjected to it. As seen, the act has a deleterious effect on the mental health of its victims. The act harms the mental health of victims. It raises questions about trust, autonomy, and consent, resulting in adverse consequences for their sexual and social lives.

The experience of this violence can impact the various domains of the victims' lives, exerting a significantly negative influence on the quality of life of each interviewee. The impact of sexual violence on the mental health of victims is more substantial than that of other types of traumas (Dworkin et al., 2017).

Study limitations

This study has some limitations. Although we consider the interviews' empirical data satisfactory, the limited number of ten participants demonstrates that it is impossible to consider it a representative sample of stealth breeding victims in Brazil. Also, our data was limited because most respondents identified as highly educated and cisgender. All the interviewees were living in an urban area. It means that other social markers should be considered to obtain a more accurate kind of different experiences of victims in the country, considering the experiences of those with lesser literacy abilities, boys below the age of 18, gay men who live in rural areas, and with trans people, for example.

Finally, as with any qualitative study, desirability bias may have affected the results and is considered a significant study limitation. Further community-based research would help determine the prevalence in the broader population, and studies that link behavioral measures to

biological outcomes would help to quantify the STI risk associated with this practice.

Conclusions

The practice of removing condoms without consent is a pervasive phenomenon that affects men and women across the globe. Notwithstanding an uptick in empirical research globally, this debate remains scarce in non-English-speaking countries. In Brazil, stealth breeding represents a significant challenge that must be acknowledged, illuminated, discussed, and ultimately overcome. Stealth breeding affects men of diverse ages, social classes, educational levels, races/ethnicities, and other social markers. The ramifications of stealth breeding extend beyond the realm of men who have contracted STIs. Furthermore, the subjects reported a range of emotional and mental health consequences.

The findings of this research offer insights that can enhance our understanding of the impact of the act on the sexual and mental health of victims. Ultimately, further investigation is required to gain deeper insight into stealth breeding. This research field would greatly benefit from a more empirical approach and greater conceptual and theoretical scrutiny. This is particularly relevant in the context of sexual and gender-based violence, where there is a shouting need to demonstrate how even consensual sexual interactions can potentially breach consent. Stealth breeding is a criminal concern and a public health matter. It thus necessitates enhanced judicial, academic, and comprehensive societal involvement not only in Brazil but also on a global scale.

The interviewees illustrate the dearth of knowledge within society regarding stealth breeding. None of the interviewees were aware of such a term at the time they experienced the violence in question. Many interviewees were only made aware that the act in question had a specific nomination when they received the survey to enroll in this study years after the incident had occurred.

Debates surrounding stealth breeding in Brazil are of paramount importance. The act needs to enact a specific law not typified in the Brazilian criminal code. For example, Switzerland was the first trial for a victim of stealthing, which constitutes rape (ABC, 2017). As stated by the Minister of Law in Parliament in Singapore, stealthing is a new sexual activity by deception or false representation. In other examples, courts in Canada, New Zealand, Germany, and the United Kingdom have all paid close attention to whether the proper use of a condom was a key factor in consent to sexual activity for the victim and whether the non-negotiable use of a condom was made clear before sexual activity began. In this sense, stealthing can be sexual assault. California remains the only state in the United States to have a law against stealthing (Mumford, 2023).

It is imperative to establish mechanisms for the identification of stealth breeding and to initiate discourse on the notion that this form of violence extends beyond the immediate physical consequences, which have a detrimental impact on the sexual and mental health of each victim. The ramifications of stealth breeding are far-reaching and encompass a range of consequences, including those that are symbolic, material, or psychological.

In closing, due to the way the victims were treated in health institutions and police stations, with treatments of homophobia and stigmatization, we argue the necessity of offering training programs for health professionals and law enforcement personnel engaged in matters about human diversity. This policy would aim to reduce the institutional difficulties in understanding gender-based issues and interpreting evidence of violence against the members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Comprehensive care needs to be widely acknowledged as a standard for modern healthcare as it has the potential to improve health service delivery, impacting both patient-centered care and clinical outcomes (Dalton et al., 2016). The findings collectively illustrate a scenario in which the perspectives of professionals, particularly those in the domains of health and law, can impede the provision of comprehensive care for victims of stealth breeding.

Among gay men, stealth breeding may result in the transmission of STIs and HIV and could have significant personal and public health implications. Given the considerable impact on public health, it is essential to scrutinize this issue at the national level and prioritize the integration of sexual health education. Knowledge of these risk factors can enable services to ask about stealth breeding among gay men or specific groups and offer specific counseling and mental health support.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author. However, the data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Institutional review board statement

This study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by The Research Ethics Committee of the Fernandes Figueira Institute (IFF-Fiocruz), protocol code 71,648,723.30000.5269. Date of approval: 31/08/2023.

Informed consent statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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