

Touch Facilitating Marital Intimacy: Married Women's Experiences in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

In a marriage relationship, touch is viewed to promote among others, physical warmth, love, affection and intimacy in the course of couples' daily interactions. In this context, intimacy represents the sum total of couples' experiences of togetherness, affection, sex and positive emotions. In the absence of these positive emotions, marriage relationships could lead to divorce. This study sought to explore married women's experiences about the influence of touch on their marital intimacy in Lavinton area in Nairobi County. Exploratory qualitative research design was employed. Interview guide was used in data collection from 13 married women. The study was guided by the attachment theory which propagates that a child who attaches him/herself to a significant other receives some protection that leads to emotional growth and security due to the bond they share. Purposive sampling via snowball technique was employed to invite participants. Pretesting of tools was carried out in order to ensure that research questions are well developed. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the data collected. The result showed that all the participants interviewed experienced touch in their marriages and testified that touch impacted positively on their spousal relationship in terms of spousal bonding, display of love and affection, sexual intimacy, emotional security and spousal reconciliation among other benefits. The findings of this study have useful benefits to married individuals and those in helping professions relating to marriage and family. They include marriage and family counselors, priests, and motivational speakers among others.

Keywords: touch, love, affection, marital intimacy, wellbeing, bonding, reconciliation

Introduction and Background

The meaning and the importance of touch could be traced back to third and fourth centuries respectively (Ferch, 2000). A number of articles and limited empirical studies have been

published regarding the benefits of touch in life generally and its impact on married couple's sense of intimacy. Touch is said to have great impact on people's behavior and biological reactions and this helps individuals to relate socially and passionately within their environment (Gallace & Spence, 2016). Also, Stamatis (2011) reiterated the importance of touch by stating that failure to receive satisfactory amount of touch could result in the following: "depression, anxiety, violence, substance abuse, inability to adequately take care of a child or engage in healthy adult relationships, and in infancy, failure to thrive, or perhaps even results in death" (p. 1430). With regard to marriage relationships, studies have shown that touch promotes physical warmth, love and affection as couples interact with each other (Debrot et al., 2013). This was evident in the study carried out by Gallace and Spence (2010) where the researchers reported that touch plays an important role in expressing love and affection during the life time of any marriage relationship, thus enhancing strong bonds between married partners. Hertenstein and Keltner (2011) viewed touch as a very important medium of social interaction through which people create strong attachments and supportive alliances. Emphasis was laid on the calming and soothing nature of touch through which individuals exhibit their desire for sex and romance. In the context of relationships, touch is a compelling sign of connection. Touch is viewed as very unique in comparison with other senses, in the sense that touch has no specific organ associated to it. Instead, "the flesh is viewed as the medium of touch; implying that the organ is neither skin nor the flesh, but something that lies deep within us, perhaps the soul or the heart... the soul is analogous to hand..." (Ferch, 2000, p.156). Touch being one of the avenues through which love, affection and intimacy are developed (Debrot et al., 2013), intimacy in a marriage relationship has been described by scholars as the expression of pleasant interactions, disclosure of private information, expression of positive feelings, perception of being understood by one's partner and the disclosure of positive emotions (Lippert & Prager, 2005). Intimacy according to Finkenauer and Buyukcan-Tetik (2015) refers to the feelings experienced by partners in a relationship that they know or understand their spouses through different interactive bases, namely what the partner voluntarily discloses, what one discloses about oneself and through besought information. In other words, intimacy develops through partners' interactions and communication which can be verbal or non-verbal. It goes to show that where partners do not understand each other or what each of them believes in or represents due to lack of both verbal

and non-verbal communication, the relationship would likely be faced with serious challenges. This is because touch is part of non-verbal communication (Merrill & Afifi 2015).

Furthermore, Taylor (2001) reported that healing touch therapy is effective in reducing stress. In addition Chang (2008) carried out a study among 39 adults regarding the concept of physical touch in caring. It was revealed that physical touch enhances an individual's comfort and emotional well-being, and also plays social and spiritual roles. Light, Grewen, and Amico (2005) examined the relationship between frequency of hugs from a spouse, plasma oxytocin and blood pressure levels among 59 premenopausal women before and after warm contact with their husbands. It was reported that frequent hugs between partners were attributed to lowering blood pressure and raising oxytocin levels in premenopausal women.

The importance of and the need for physical touch cannot be over-emphasized due to the fact that physical touch in a close and romantic relationship enhances couples' connection with each other (Brown, 2017). The author further expressed fears that the rate at which touch is being ignored in close relationships is alarming. This notion was reiterated by Gordon (2016) where he pointed out that modern-day couples have become strangers in their marriages by living 'unhappily ever after' as a result of lack of connectedness. Similarly, Khojastehmehr and Takrimi (2009) revealed that among many factors that lead to divorce were the following: neglect - feeling of being unloved, lack of intimacy, and lack of communication skills, such as verbal and nonverbal communication. This was echoed by Kardan-Souraki, Hamzehgardeshi, Asadpour, Mohammadpour, and Khani (2016) who reported that marriage relationship that is devoid of touch, romance and intimacy is a fertile ground for divorce. Furthermore, a study carried out in Israel by Goldstein, Weissman-Fogel, and Shamay-Tsoory (2017) revealed that touch is very crucial in connecting spouses to the extent that lack of it, especially where a spouse is experiencing some pain, could lead to spouses growing apart. This could lead to a problematic relationship or even divorce. In Africa, some scholars point to the fact that the seeming prevalence of high divorce rate may be attributable to lack of intimacy among married couples. In this regard, Asante, Osafo and Nyamekye (2014) reported that the alarming rate of divorce in the urban region of Ghana was as a result of lack of love and affection among married couples within the region. As shown above, touch is one of the sources of love and affection. With reference to East Africa, in Uganda, Bokaie, Khalesi, and Yasini-Ardekani (2017) reported on

the diagnosis and treatment of unconsummated marriage of a couple resulting from the fact that the couple was unable to have sex naturally as a result of vaginismus (involuntary vaginal muscle spasm in women). The resultant effect of this problem was that vaginal penetration was made impossible (Bokaie et al., (2017). Among the treatments prescribed was psycho-education where the couple was taught the importance of touch. They were encouraged to explore their bodies through touch. This directly relates to this current study in the sense that touch is an integral part of sexual relationship in marriage. As such, lack of sexual interaction may likely affect the level of intimacy in that relationship.

In Kenya, Karina (2013) identified physical and emotional health challenges, among others, as factors affecting intimacy in a marriage relationship. In the same vein, Hart (2018) reiterated the importance of freedom among couples to be able to talk just about anything in their relationship. He added that where there is no talking and touching, couples tend to lose touch with each other. In a situation where couples have developed some rifts between them, touch has been identified as a reconciliatory factor in such a marriage relationship. In this context, Gullledge, Gullledge, and Stahmann's (2003) study examined the relationship between touch such as cuddling, kissing, stroking, and marital satisfaction among 100 men and 195 women. They came to the conclusion that although touch enhances marital intimacy, not all forms of physical contacts resulted in intimacy for every individual. They further reported that contacts such as cuddling, holding hands, hugging and kissing played an important role in resolving conflicts among the partners. But the question is, how often do married couples engage in this habit of touching each other in order to generate some level of intimacy in their relationships?

Although touch takes the center stage of an individual's daily interactions from cradle to the grave, Gallace and Spence (2010), expressed alarm at very scanty scientific research that has been carried out on touch. This study therefore sought to explore married women's experiences about the influence of touch on their marital intimacy in terms of: spousal bonding, love and affection, sexual intimacy and spousal reconciliation. The study was carried out in Lavington area within Nairobi County. The study site was chosen due to its accessibility to the researcher, enabling the researcher to recruit married women living in the area using purposive sampling method through snowball technique. Furthermore, Lavington is cosmopolitan, thereby comprising married women of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The study was guided by the attachment theory propounded by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth whose tenet was that a child who attaches himself/herself to a significant other perceives some level of protection leading to emotional growth as well as security arising from the bond relationship between the child and parents or caregivers (Bretherton, 1992; Cassidy, 2008). It is in this light that this study employed the attachment theory as a tool to explore and interpret the sense married women make out of their relationships with their spouses in regard to touch. The researcher was making the assumption that securely attached individuals seem to be more stable and committed in their romantic relationships as reported in Samples-Steele's (2011) study, that individuals who are securely attached to their partners are linked to more positive experiences, satisfaction and committed to their union because they have a higher tendency to touch their partners more. Samples-Steele (2011), further reported that they express themselves more nonverbally and feel more devoted to their romantic relationship.

The findings generated from this study would bring to the awareness of the general public, particularly those in marriage relationships, the relevance of touch in a romantic relationship. Furthermore, this knowledge would also be very beneficial to professionals such as counselors, priests, pastors and motivational speakers who offer their services to married couples. In this regard, the level of conflicts experienced in marriages would be addressed and this in turn could reduce the rate of divorce among couples.

Methodology

This study used exploratory qualitative research design whose philosophical underpinning was based on a constructivist paradigm which indicated that truth is based on one's own viewpoints (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The idea of qualitative method was to get the real experiences of the participants. In this case, participants were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences about touch in their marriage. Exploratory design facilitated obtaining in-depth information regarding touch experiences of married women and how these had an impact on their marital intimacy. The target population was married women living in Lavington, Westlands Constituency within Nairobi County. The study participants were 13 married women living with their husbands at the time of the study who were recruited using purposive sampling through snowball technique. The age of the participants fell within the brackets of 37 years and 68 years. Their minimum educational qualification was secondary education for ease of communication.

The participants came from different walks of life, namely, housewives, psychologists, businesswomen, self-employed businesswoman, lawyers, and students.

The instrument of data collection was an interview guide. With the help of an open-ended in-depth interview, data was collected from the participants with the help of an audio recorder. The interview took approximately between 45 minutes to an hour. Participation in the study was voluntary since the researcher sought informed consent from the participants. High standards of confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms for the participants' real names during report writing and by carrying out the interview in a very conducive environment. This was to ensure that participants did not suffer from any harmful conditions during the study. Data was securely preserved in a soft copy which was only accessible to the researcher by means of a password. Research permits were obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and the Ministry of Education State Department of Early Learning and Basic Education. Further approvals were sought from Tangaza University College Research Ethics Committee and Daystar University Ethics Review Board.

Data analysis was carried out through thematic analysis. This is a method where patterns/themes that are found within the data are identified, analyzed, and reported (Braun & Clark, 2006). During the data analysis, verbatim transcription of the interview was made available portraying insights on participants' personal experiences and perceptions. The analysis of data in this study adopted the following six steps propounded by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) Researcher familiarizing with the data collected by way of reading and re-reading the text to ensure accuracy; (2) Generating initial codes where data was coded in a meaningful and systematic way. Focus was on coding segments of the data that were useful to the research questions; (3) Searching for themes where the identified codes were examined and gathered into possible themes; (4) Reviewing themes by reassessing the original data to ensure that the emerging themes fitted with individual data as well as the entire data set; (5) Defining and naming themes, (6) Producing the final report which included extracts of individual quotes to support the themes and linking them to the literature and research objectives.

Results

The main research question of this study was to find out the influence of touch on marital relationship as experienced by married women. The results are presented in themes that were generated from the participants' responses.

The demographic details of the participants were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Details of the Participants

Participant	Age	Education	Duration of Marriage in years
P1	55	Diploma	26
P2	55	Bachelor's degree	35
P3	45	Master's degree	7
P4	51	Bachelor's degree	26
P5	50	Bachelor's degree	23
P6	55	Secondary school	26
P7	45	Diploma	16
P8	44	Master's degree	18
P9	51	Bachelor's degree	24
P10	37	Bachelor's degree	9
P11	68	Master's degree	45
P12	46	Master's degree	19
P13	38	Bachelor's degree	8

The total number of participants in this study was 13 married women. The age of the participants ranged from 37 to 68. The participants had been married for between 7 years and 45 years as at the time of the interview. The majority of the participants had been in marriage from 10 years and above. This has afforded the participants adequate experiences of married life from which the research has benefited greatly. All participants were living with their spouses at the time of the study. The participants had diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds as they come from different geographical locations in Africa and Asia but all reside in Nairobi- Kenya. The educational background of the participants ranged from ‘O’ Level certificate to Master’s degree. All the participants in the study acknowledged with excitement the pivotal role touch played in enhancing their intimate relationship under the following themes:

Spousal bonding/connection

Most of the participants shared that touch in their marital interaction made them feel very connected with their spouses in different ways. They expressed that the bonding with their spouses generated happiness within their union. This was confirmed by the joy they exhibited as they shared their experiences. They were happy as they discussed the touch phenomenon. They further explained that the fact that they were touched by their partners expressed a lot of love and bonding between them and this strengthened their relationship even more. For example some of the participants’ expressions in this regard were as follows:

P2 remarked:

“For me, touch means connection because when I am touched by my husband, it conveys a message to me that, I am here for you, I love you, I am happy to be with you.”

P1 said this:

“It makes me feel that aah....I am not alone...when there are issues, I have somebody with me, I mean that I have consolation from someone, a lot of companionship, mmh... touch does bring us closer at times.”

According to P6:

Touch has got a very big role in our relationship as husband and wife. It plays a very big role and if there was no touch I think...there would have

[been] no relationship because I think it sort of brings us together, the bonding is there between husband and wife, the closeness, and it is not just sexual intercourse. Just... you feel the closeness of the person, the intimacy of the person ...otherwise, it will be no relationship in that union if there was no touch. It does play a very big role in the union between husband and wife.

P11 remarked:

“With my spouse we hug each other and that shows more close relationship and makes you feel good that you want to hug your spouse even in the church and outside the church probably sometimes in some ceremonies.”

Some of the participants remarked that couples who touch each other create a strong bond between them and when that touch is not there, the problem of suspicion arises, as stated by P7 in the following:

That touch makes you connected because in a way if you are in marriage and you don't touch each other, you get disconnected and then that is how now people start moving around...because they feel, this guy is not touching me so she is not there with me let me look for attention somewhere else...yaah.

P13 concurred that:

“There is no connection when there is no touch, even at times... you can have suspicions, if he is not touching me, is he touching somebody else, although I never had a reason to doubt him but it crosses your mind.”

Apart from touch playing the role of bringing the couples closer and creating a strong bond between them, the experience of some of the participants was beyond just connection between them and their spouses. They expressed that touch was very important in their marriage relationship and that it put them in the right mood generating joy and happiness. In this perspective P9 articulated her experiences as follows:

Touch for me is...very important in a relationship, in marriage. It connects two people. So, if you have someone that touches you and I must say in the right places, you know, you tend to maybe look forward to those touches...it does something to you, it puts you in the right mood, it brings joy because, sometimes it can make you laugh...

Display of love and affection

The majority of the participants expressed that touch in their spousal relationship was a sign of love and affection from their spouses. This, they reported made them to appreciate their relationship with their partners because they viewed their marital interactions as being meaningful to them. According to them, the feeling of love they enjoyed brought them even closer. This has enhanced their intimacy. In this regard, P3 shared this:

“Okay, I would say that touch... I respond very positively. I think for me touch is a show of love and affection from my husband and I think it was even more.”

P9 also shared the following:

“I think that it’s a way of showing affection. From that touch there is care, there is love in that touch. He is touching you just to show that he is still here and he still cares about you and he still loves you. You know, so it is a very important part of marriage.”

Sexual intimacy

The majority of the participants were very open and confident in discussing the role of touch in sexual activities. Most of them acknowledged that touch played a fundamental role in enhancing sexual relationship between them and their spouses. They explained that touch prepared them well enough to engage in a sexual relationship with their spouses. In this regard, they would not run the risk of having painful sexual intercourse, as their bodies would be fully aroused in readiness for appreciating the exchange that goes with sex. They further explained that touch enabled them to understand the desires and the mood of their spouses. This, they said gave them a lot of joy and satisfaction as the experience pointed to the fact that there was love and support in their marriage. This in effect they expressed strengthened their marital bonds.

P2 said:

Yaah... touch also... because even before we go to... maybe having sex, that touch eeh... makes me know that he is there for me and that he is like preparing me to be ready for whatever is coming... meaning that I am ready now for sex. That touch is like to calm me even if I was maybe stressed but that touching is like the preparation...like now to lead me to sex.

P5 also said:

Now when it comes to like the bedroom issue, Mmmh.... I think as a woman I appreciate more when my husband kisses me ehmm.....touch my breast, that makes me get a better feeling and be more prepared than just, you know get there and get direct to the action. For sure, you know I appreciate when we start by touching, kissing, it brings a better feeling and closeness to the way we even end up into the main thing-sex ... It even makes me as a woman feel better, get wet easily when there is that touching, kissing, before the sex.” “I think touch brings all that feeling of being loved and I think for sure touch is important in any marriage, in any sex life. Touch is important. It’s a way of communicating to your partner that you love him more than just you want that action to be done quickly and you go, the touch brings in, that it’s like spicing the whole thing of love making.

For participant No. 3, although touch from her spouse got her into the mood of having sex, there was another condition that made her sexual activity even more interesting: her ovulation. She explained that during her ovulation (release of mature female germ cell ready for fertilization), she responded to touch more positively. She stated:

I think really, the way I react to it depends on what time of month it is because I don’t know, if ovulating like the time when you are fertile, I would say it is very, I would say the touch ... I respond very positively but there are those days aahm...if am not ovulating, I know it is not as affectionate as those days when my body is ready to have sex... Like I said, the days that I am fertile, for me it’s more, I am ready for it, I like it...it is usually very nice when I am fertile and am ready to have sex. But if am not, I know he is affectionate and he loves me but then there are

even those times when he will touch me and I am like, I don't want to have sex today please, so put your hand off me, or don't touch me. I don't say it but it is how I feel.

P7 concurred that:

Touch means you are loved and before any sexual activity, there is that touch, yaah, there is a specific way that a man can touch a wife or a woman in a way that the woman feels that they are wanted, yah...that is another way of ...you just don't come and tell your wife I want to have sex with you! No, there is a process...and that process is when they touch you, you feel wanted, you feel nice.

The same participant No. 7 also added that although touch complements sexual intimacy, the physiological state of the individual could get in the way of that sexual exercise. For instance, tiredness may actually put someone out of the mood for any sexual activity, despite the touch. In other words, the influence of touch on a sexual activity has some limitations. To this end, she said:

When you don't want to be touched, especially when you are tired, in marriage, people think it's automatic...It is not automatic. At times, yes, they will come and touch you and you will feel nothing. It's the way we react, our body reacts. When you are tired, you shut down even if someone comes to touch you, you are not there, or when you are not in good terms you don't even [want] him to touch you.

Furthermore, P10 remarked thus:

When you go to ...when you make love, touch directs me, makes me understand how he is feeling and I think it also makes him know how I am feeling and whether he should continue doing that to me so, it leads me to the next level. Now touch on itself it's also stimulating. It stimulates me to the next level (laughs). Touch itself to some people is very satisfying maybe it is what makes them feel even more sexually satisfied than the real act. So, it shows how you understand touch and how it makes you get your feelings of satisfaction.

Spousal reconciliation

In response to the question, what role does touch play in spousal reconciliation? Quite a number of participants agreed that touch between them helped them resolve some of the disputes encountered in their spousal relationships. This experience helped them to bury many hatches. It also provided them with new opportunities to forgive each other and that strengthened their bond even more.

P1 said:

Eehmm....when we have a misunderstanding that leads to a bitter argument, touching and embracing me afterwards really sinks it in deep that the problem is over. Like it's over and done with. Yah, it puts an end to that misunderstanding. Touch does play a part.

Some of the participants noted that resolving their differences with touch has made them feel good or even better and accepted. It also showed a sense of remorse on the part of their partner. This, they believed kept them going even stronger in their relationship.

P2 said:

Mmh... if he touches me like for example we have disagreed and we have exchanged may be harsh words, and then maybe I storm off and go to the bedroom and he follows me and he hugs me and says sorry, for me, that means like, that is the highest of the connection. I feel better, I feel good, I feel accepted, and I feel like he is indeed sorry for what he has said.

P5 also said:

Oh, let me tell you, even if there is a misunderstanding in marriage, and your partner comes and just holds you and cuddles you saying sorry, that means a lot. And it will make you feel like loved, leading you to forgive any situation. To me touch is even stronger than use of words.

In the same vein, P6 said:

If there is a misunderstanding between me and my husband, touch will play a role because there will be closeness like hugging...the bonding and saying I am sorry for what I have done...The touch has to come there, the closeness will come (laughs) you know, it will not be there if we don't have the touch. It will be like, I don't want to see you, I don't want to touch you, and we are finished. Now you are ending like it's becoming bitter. We are not sorting out matters properly because now it is bitterness working in the two parties. Yaah! Because, now I will not even touch you and you will not even touch me...the closeness is not there. But the touch has to be there when we are solving the problem. There has to be closeness.

Supportively, P7 said:

Okay, it [touch] does a lot of things... when you are mad, you don't want even him to touch you. You are boiling but, I'm stubborn you know but when he insists, he comes and touches you and hug you, you feel like okay, we are mad, I am mad but (laughs) this guy is concerned, okay you will put an act to show that you are so mad, you don't want even to talk but he is there touching you, holding you and then somehow, you give up, you give in because he is there insisting and touching you...you might not even say anything but that touch and hugs, you are just quite...it means a lot, it means a lot.

According to P13:

“Touch connects us and provides healing from a dispute... it's actually a dispute resolution in a way come to think of it.”

P8 concurred by saying:

Ehmm...Yah, it does play some...it does have some significance because if there is a conflict and we are lying down next to each other, we find out that there is hardly any touch... but you know, when one party feels that they want to make up, then they begin to touch and then there is an

embrace and you know... so, touch does speak words you know, that is, I mean when I feel my husband's hand, that means he is telling me, I am sorry you know. So, it does play a role in reconciliation.

As P9 added:

Touch in some way... can now heal the pain or can I say close the gap that had been created as a result of that misunderstanding that you had. Just because of that touch it can lead to now reconciliation, it can lead to now... you talking again and resolving whatever brought about that misunderstanding, yes it can also lead to love making... you know, which when you are upset with someone, you don't even want to see them not to mention making love to them you know... that touch, it softens the ground and then they are even able to move to the next level... to the next and you wonder, what were you even fighting about again and you forget about it. Yah, so it has helped in some way [in] resolving misunderstandings.

While the majority of the participants acknowledged that touch helped them resolve disputes in their marriage, some of the participants felt that for any reconciliation to take place, there must be an apology before their spouse could touch them. In particular, Participant number 3 emphasized the following:

No for me, it doesn't mean anything to me because I think the apology should come before the touch. It should come before because you need to really settle whatever the disagreement was before they show affection. You know there are people ... people are different. There are people who use sex as a way of making up. For me it can't work, it can't work. If we have a disagreement we need to work out the disagreement and we cannot work it out with sex (Laughs). I think for me, if my husband upsets me I expect an apology. I don't expect a touch (Laughs).

P3 re-affirmed that after an apology was tendered, she would then enjoy the touch from her spouse as a sign of that reconciliation. She then said:

Yeah then I think aah.... in that case it's a show of care. He is caring about me, he loves me, and he wants to show me that what has just happened or what he said or did, does not change the fact that he cares for me and that he loves me. So, yah, for me then that will be that, aah... that will be a way of showing love and care for me.

Similar sentiments were shared by another participant who noted that touch alone may not resolve whatever problem they might be having especially now that she was advanced in age. She believed that proper apology should run concurrently with touch for the reconciliation to be achieved. For instance, P4 said:

Depending on the approach because ehmm... for a resolution will not come with a touch of, oh! You know I love you or just excuses to make you feel like disregard all the problems that we have had...I am touching you and things can go normal. To me, to an extent it can bring that feeling that I am here you know, like maybe we are having an argument like he is reaching out like...I want to hug you, I want us to forget about this situation but at the same time, maybe my age again, after being in marriage for so long ...when I was a bit younger, I would take those hugs and touches with a lot of emotions and things like that but as I grow older now, it's different for me.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore married women's experiences about the influence of touch on their marital intimacy in terms of spousal bonding, love and affection, sexual intimacy and spousal reconciliation. The study found that touch between married partners was central to their experiences of connectedness with each other, love and affection, sexual intimacy and spousal reconciliation.

The findings of this study were related to the findings of previous studies. For instance, in the case of spousal bonding, Goldstein et al. (2017) revealed that touch is very crucial in connecting spouses together. A similar finding was also reported by Brown (2017) that positive physical touch promotes social and emotional bonding

between romantic partners. With regard to love and affection, the findings revealed that touch from a romantic partner generated the feeling of love and affection which are relatable to the findings of Debrot et al. (2013) which reported improved state of married couples.

In the same vein, Gallace and Spence (2010) reported that touch played an important role in expressing love and affection in the life time of any marriage relationship. The findings on sexual intimacy indicated that participants in this study were of the opinion that touch enhanced their sexual intimacy, making their sexual intercourse experiences more pleasurable. These findings are related to the findings of Hertenstein and Keltner (2011) who reported that touch has a calming and soothing effect by which individuals exhibit their desire for sex and romance. Similarly, Bokaie et al. (2017) reported on the diagnosis and treatment of unconsummated marriage of a couple. They prescribed as part of the treatment psycho-education where the couple was taught the importance of touch.

Finally, the findings on spousal reconciliation showed that touch played an important role in resolving differences in marriage relationships. This was related to the findings of Gullledge, Gullledge and Stahmann (2003) who reported that physical contacts such as cuddling, holding hands, hugging and kissing were important ingredients in reconciling married partners. However, participants 3 and 4 emphatically objected to the idea that touch could resolve their differences with their spouses automatically. They argued that for touch to reconcile them with their spouses, proper apology should be tendered by their offending spouses. According to them, it is only then that they would appreciate touch from their spouses in times of conflict. To this extent, there was no literature that could be related to these findings.

These findings imply that the soothing nature of touch is an important factor in any marriage relationship as it generates positive emotions among married partners. These in turn reduce stress (Taylor, 2001), and enhance individual's comfort and emotional wellbeing (Chang, 2008). These findings agree very well with the attachment theory which indicates through Samples-Steele's (2011) study that individuals who are securely attached to their partners are linked to more positive

experiences, satisfaction and commitment to their union due to the fact that they have a higher tendency to touch their partners more.

Conclusion

This study was aimed at exploring the influence of touch on marital intimacy as experienced by married women within Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings have clearly shown that touch in a marriage relationship was pivotal in the enhancement of marital intimacy in terms of spousal bonding, love and affection, sexual intimacy and spousal reconciliation. Therefore the findings of this study would be useful to couples in marriage relationships in enhancing their closeness and bonding. Likewise, it would also be beneficial to those in the helping services such as family and marriage therapists, counselors, priests, pastors, motivational speakers and the general public as a form of teaching and counseling tool.

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