

‘The Status of Human Touch’ (Volume I) – A NIVEA report, published October 2020

Executive Summary

In 2018 the global skincare brand NIVEA began discussing a perceived epidemic of touch deprivation – both emotional and physical – with international experts in psychology, sociology, neuroscience and education. Following those discussions, in 2019 NIVEA commissioned a global survey of the general public to understand people’s experience with touch, the desire for it, the benefits and the barriers.

The result is a sweeping, first-of-its-kind global report on today’s state of human touch. The report, which covers 12,207 interviewed people in 12 countries, embeds the latest scientific research on the benefits of touch, as well as analysis from a multi-disciplinary group of scientists and researchers. Insights gained from focus group discussions, a quantitative online survey and personal touch diaries reveal an alarming discrepancy between the ideal and the actual amount of touch that people around the world experience. The findings clearly show that the importance of touch in people’s lives and the desire for it are nearly universal, but most people are not getting the touch they need – suggesting that human touch may be at risk.

The report was originally scheduled to be released in March 2020, but COVID-19 struck. Given the unprecedented circumstances, NIVEA decided to invest additional resources in a companion piece of research, which measured people’s experience with human touch and feelings of loneliness during the pandemic. Together, the two reports provide a comprehensive view of the current state of human touch.

This document is a summary of the findings based on fieldwork in 2018 and 2019.

Key findings from the ‘Status of Human Touch’ Volume I

Nine out of 10 people around the globe believe that human touch is key to leading a happy, fulfilled life, and that the absence of it will make them feel lonely. But two thirds are not experiencing physical touch on a daily basis.

- Touch has overwhelmingly positive associations for most people. The top 3 associations that people have with touch are:
 - love,
[global: 96%; similar high in Germany, China, Italy, South Africa, India (all 98%), Brazil (97%), the US, Thailand, Australia, Switzerland (all 96%), UK (95%); France somewhat lower (92%)]
 - affection and
[global: 96%; Italy, South Africa, Brazil (all 98%), Germany, India, US, Australia, UK (all 96%), Switzerland (95%), China, France (both 94%) on global level; Thailand lower (91%)]
 - care
[global: 94%; above global average: South Africa, Brazil, India, China (all 98%); Australia, Thailand (both 96%), UK (95%), the US (94%) and Germany (92%) in the midfield; less linked in Italy, France (both 89%) and Switzerland (88%)]

- Most people are not experiencing as much touch as they would like. Globally, two thirds of the respondents indicated that touch is not a daily occurrence in their lives, [global: 64%; especially true in China (81%), Thailand (80%) and India (72%); South Africa and France (both 65%) both rank on global level; in the UK (61%), Brazil (60%), Australia (59%), the US, Germany, Switzerland (all 56%), but especially in Italy (53%) missing touch is less of an issue]

but 71 percent would like to get more hugs.
[global: 71%; China, India (both 82%) and Brazil (81%) with especially high desire, followed by Italy (77%), Thailand (76%) and South Africa (75%); contrary to somewhat lower wish for hugs in France, the UK, the US (all 64%), Germany (63%), Australia and Switzerland (both 62%)]

One out of six respondents experienced no physical contact at all the day before the interview.
[global: 17%; highest agreement in the UK (29%), Germany (28%) and Australia (26%), but also in France, the US (both 21%) and Switzerland (20%); on average: South Africa (16%) and Thailand (15%); more physical contact reported in Brazil (12%), India (10%), Italy (7%) and especially China (2%)]
- Older adults are most at risk. Compared to other age groups, people aged 50-69 reported fewer experiences with human touch in their daily lives.
[global (experienced touch yesterday): 60%; 16-19 years 58%; 20-35 years 66%; 36-49 years 60%; 50-69 years 50%]

Modern digital lifestyle and confusion about the right level of touch are keeping us apart.

- We are connected, yet disconnected. Globally, more than 80 percent of the respondents feel that more and more virtual connections diminish the skill of empathy, [global: 82%; especially people in India (86%), South Africa and Thailand (both 85%) agree; Brazil (84%), Australia (83%), the UK, Italy, China (all 82%), the US (80%) on average level; people in Switzerland (78%), Germany and France (both 77%) agree less]

which leads to less touch. Half of the respondents noted that time spent on social media was a barrier to physical touch.
[global: 51%; especially an issue in India (70%), Thailand (69%), Brazil (63%), South Africa (62%), but also in China (55%); less of a barrier in Italy (48%), Australia (47%), the US (46%), the UK and France (both 44%) and yet with distance in Switzerland (36%) and Germany (33%)]
- Touch takes a backseat in our busy lives. 70 percent of people believe that the value of human touch is not top of mind in modern life,
[global: 70%; high agreement in India and the UK (both 82%), followed by Thailand, Australia (both 79%), South Africa (78%) and the US (75%); Brazil (72%) and France (71%) on global level; lower agreement in China (66%) but especially Switzerland (56%), Italy (54%) and Germany (50%)]

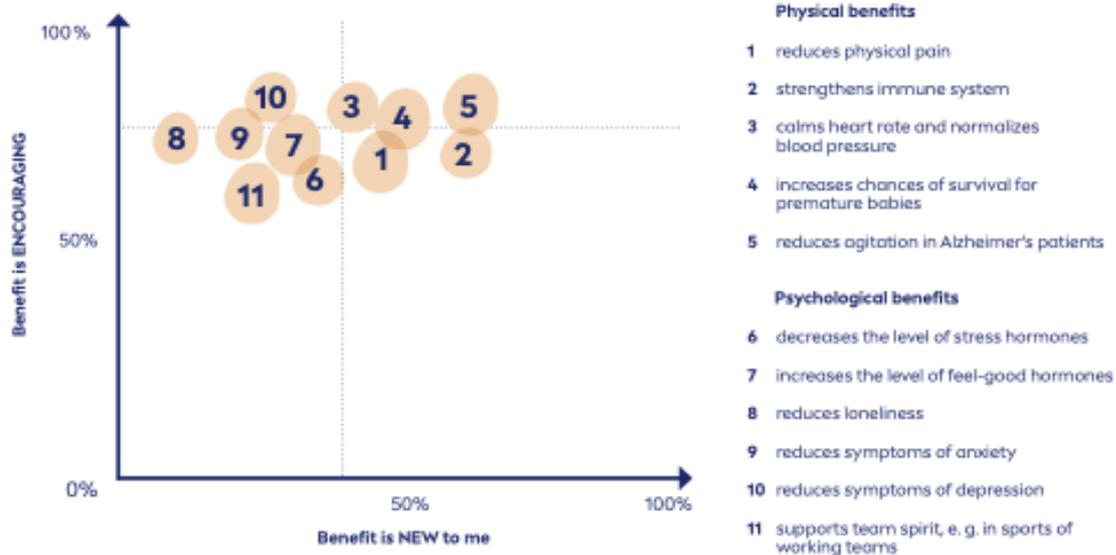
with 63 percent reporting to be too busy to take time to connect with others.
[global: 63%; esp. people in Thailand (77%), India (76%), South Africa (75%), China (69%) and Brazil (68%) feel too busy; average: Australia, the US (both 65%) and the UK (62%); less in Switzerland (54%), France (51%), Italy and Germany (both 49%)]
- Uncertainty about how much touch is appropriate can keep people isolated. 77 percent of men and 75 percent of women shared that personal insecurities, such as being unsure if people would be comfortable receiving a hug, prevent them from initiating touch.
[men - global: 77%; insecurity particularly among men in Thailand, India, South Africa (all 85%), China (83%) and Brazil (82%); average in Australia (77%), the US (75%), France (75%), Italy (75%); less male uncertainty in the UK (72%), Switzerland (69%) and Germany (64%)]

[women - global: 75%; insecurity particularly among women in China (86%), Thailand (85%) and India (84%), followed by South Africa (81%) and Brazil (80%); on global level: France (75%) and the US (74%); somewhat less female uncertainty in Australia (72%), Italy (72%), UK (70%) and again in Switzerland and Germany (both 61%)]

Addressing the knowledge gap on touch's health benefits is key to inspiring more touch.

- Many people are unaware of the physical health benefits of touch. More than a third of respondents did not know that physical touch decreases the level of stress hormones, [global: 35%; exceptionally low awareness in China (58%); on global level in Brazil (37%), India, South Africa, the UK (all 36%), Thailand, the US (both 35%) and Australia (34%); less new for people in Italy (32%) and particularly in France (29%), Switzerland and Germany (both 27%)]
and more than half of the respondents did not know that touch strengthens the immune system.
[global: 53%; missing knowledge especially in South Africa (66%), followed by the UK (62%), Australia (59%), India (56%), Thailand, the US (both 55%), China (54%) and France (52%); better knowledge in Brazil (50%), Italy (49%) and Switzerland (45%) as well as in Germany (37%)]
- Knowledge of the benefits inspires to touch more. For nearly nine out of ten people the benefits are encouraging enough to include more physical touch in their daily lives.
[global: 86%; information especially valued in India (93%), South Africa, Thailand, Brazil (all 92%); average in Italy and China (both 88%), the US (87%), the UK and Australia (both 84%); lower impact in those countries knowing many facts already: France (81%), Switzerland (76%) and Germany (72%)]
 - Reduction of stress hormones activates 86 percent of the people to touch more.
[global: 86%; high motivation in India (95%), South Africa and Thailand (92%) as well as Brazil (91%); on global level in the US (88%), Italy (88%), UK and Australia (both 86%); somewhat lower encouragement in France (83%), China (81%), Switzerland (77%) and lowest again in Germany (73%)]
 - Strengthening of the immune system motivates 85 percent.
[global: 85%; high motivation in Thailand (92%), India and Brazil (both 91%), South Africa (90%) and in the US (88%); on global level in Italy (87%) and China (86%), somewhat lower encouragement in the UK (82%) and Australia (82%) as well as in France (80%) and lowest in Switzerland (75%) and in Germany (73%)]
- There is a great demand for a more positive approach to address touch deprivation. About 90 percent of people believe that we need to talk more about the benefits of human touch, [global: 91%; somewhat higher demand seen in South Africa (96%), Thailand (95%), India, Brazil and Italy (all 94%) as well as China (93%); the US (90%), the UK, Australia and France (all 89%) as well as Switzerland (88%) rank in midfield; a bit less need seen in Germany (85%)]
and 84 percent think that schools should teach the importance of human touch.
[global: 84%; high desire in India (94%), followed by Thailand (93%), Italy (91%), South Africa and China (both 88%); average agreement in Brazil (86%) and the UK (82%); less need seen in Australia and Switzerland (both 81%), France (79%), Germany (78%), but also in the US (73%)]

New and encouraging: Physical and psychological benefits of touch



Source: Mindline Research 2019

Source: NIVEA 2020 / mindline research 2019

About the NIVEA brand

NIVEA has a long legacy of innovation in skincare dating back to the launch of NIVEA Crème by Beiersdorf in 1911. The Power of Human Touch initiative also supports the Beiersdorf corporate purpose, which is to 'Care Beyond Skin'.

Research Methodology:

Volume I was conducted by mindline, an independent research institute, as an online survey of 12,207 people in the following 12 countries (approximately 1,000 respondents per country): Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, the UK and the US. Survey respondents were between 16-69 years of age, and were a representative sample based on gender, age, region and occupational status. The study was conducted between October 2018 and March 2019.

Focus group discussions in 11 countries, conducted by Happy Thinking People, an independent research institute, preceded the quantitative research.