

International Journal Research Publication Analysis

Page: 01-05

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT OPPORTUNITIES, RISKS, AND GOVERNANCE FOR GENDER EQUITY IN 2026

***Dr Sandhiya V.**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Gurunanak College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu,
India.*

Article Received: 19 June 2026

Article Revised: 09 July 2026

Published on: 29 July 2026

***Corresponding Author: Dr Sandhiya V.**

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Gurunanak College, Chennai, Tamil
Nadu, India.

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.4586>

ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence is increasingly shaping economic, educational, social, and institutional systems, creating significant implications for women's empowerment. This review examines the role of AI in expanding women's access to learning, employment, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion, while also assessing the risks of bias, exclusion, digital violence, and weak accountability. The study uses a narrative review approach and synthesizes recent 2026 institutional reports and scholarly sources to identify key patterns in the relationship between AI and gender equity. Current evidence indicates that AI can support women's empowerment when systems are designed with inclusive data, gender-responsive governance, and meaningful women's participation in leadership and oversight. The paper concludes that AI should be treated not only as a technological issue, but also as a policy and human rights concern.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence, Women's Empowerment, Gender Equity, Algorithmic Bias, Digital Inclusion, Governance.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has become a major driver of digital transformation across public and private life. It now influences hiring, education, health services, communication platforms, entrepreneurship, and decision-support systems, thereby shaping opportunities for women as users, workers, and leaders. At the same time, recent evidence shows that AI can reproduce

older gender stereotypes, intensify online abuse, and exclude women from the decisions that shape digital futures. Women's empowerment in the AI era should be understood as more than access to digital tools. It includes fair representation in AI development, equal access to AI-enabled opportunities, protection from algorithmic harm, and the ability to influence governance frameworks. This paper reviews current evidence to examine both the empowering and disempowering effects of AI on women, with special attention to sources published in 2026.

Method

This paper adopts a narrative literature review design. Priority was given to 2026 sources from UN Women, UNESCO, IndiaAI, and related policy-oriented publications because these provide the most current evidence relevant to women's empowerment and AI governance. Supporting scholarly sources were also considered to strengthen the conceptual background on bias, explainability, and women's career development in AI contexts. The purpose of the review is to synthesize current knowledge rather than to estimate effect sizes.

Literature Review

Recent literature presents AI as both an opportunity and a risk for gender equity. On the opportunity side, the 2026 UN Women and IndiaAI casebook highlights real-world AI solutions that advance women's health, safety, financial inclusion, livelihoods, and access to justice. The casebook draws on more than 230 submissions from innovators across over 50 countries, showing that context-specific AI applications can address persistent gender gaps. A 2026 scoping review on AI applications supporting women's career development further suggests that AI can help women access training, job matching, mentorship, and professional mobility. UNESCO's 2026 South Asia panel also emphasized the importance of women's participation across the AI lifecycle, from education and skilling to research leadership and policy oversight. These sources support the view that AI can contribute to empowerment when access, design, and governance are deliberately inclusive.

AI and Empowerment

AI can expand women's economic participation by improving access to skills training, job opportunities, and entrepreneurial support. AI-enabled learning systems can personalize instruction and make education more accessible for women and girls facing time, mobility, or location barriers. In employment, AI can support resume screening, career guidance, and workforce planning, although these uses require careful oversight to avoid reproducing

discrimination. AI also has potential in healthcare, where decision-support tools and digital health platforms can improve access to information and services. In safety and justice, AI-powered platforms can help identify risks, connect survivors to support, and improve response mechanisms. These practical applications show that AI can strengthen women's agency when it is built around lived realities rather than abstract efficiency.

Bias and Exclusion

The major concern in current 2026 evidence is that AI systems often reproduce gender bias instead of reducing it. UN Women warned in June 2026 that AI is "getting women wrong," noting that systems continue to mirror old stereotypes and amplify online abuse. A UN Women-commissioned study cited in 2026 found that 44 percent of 133 AI systems demonstrated gender bias, while 26 percent showed both gender and racial bias. These findings indicate that bias is structural, not accidental. This matters because AI is increasingly used in areas where women already face disadvantage, including hiring, content moderation, and visibility on digital platforms. If training data reflect historical inequalities, automated outputs can normalize those same inequalities at scale. As a result, the promise of efficiency can become a mechanism for reinforcing exclusion unless systems are carefully audited and corrected.

Leadership and Representation

Women's empowerment in AI also depends on who participates in building and governing the technology. UNESCO's 2026 panel in South Asia reported persistent gaps in workforce participation and research leadership, even as AI becomes more central to economic life. The discussion emphasized that women remain unevenly represented across the AI lifecycle, from data and design to deployment and oversight. Representation in AI leadership is important because it affects what problems are prioritized and how risks are interpreted. When women are underrepresented, issues such as harassment, caregiving constraints, reproductive health, or safety in public space may be overlooked. Gender-inclusive leadership therefore improves not only fairness but also the quality and relevance of AI systems.

Governance and Policy

The 2026 sources make clear that empowerment depends on governance. UN Women's reporting suggests that many AI strategies still fail to integrate gender in a meaningful way, leaving gaps in accountability and protection. The GATE recommendations on gender equality and AI argue that facial recognition, biometric surveillance, and generative AI can

harm trans and gender-diverse people through exclusionary design and biased data. These harms show that AI governance must address both discrimination and human rights. Effective governance should include transparent documentation, gender impact assessments, human oversight, and independent audits. It should also require diverse participation in policy making, procurement, and evaluation. Without such measures, AI can accelerate inequality instead of correcting it.

DISCUSSION

The evidence suggests that AI has a conditional relationship with women's empowerment. Where systems are inclusive, well-governed, and context-sensitive, AI can improve access to education, health, work, and safety. Where systems are biased, opaque, and exclusionary, they can deepen inequality and widen the digital divide. For this reason, women's empowerment should be treated as a design principle, not a downstream benefit. Governments, universities, technology firms, and civil society organizations need to build AI systems that are accountable, explainable, and gender-responsive. This is especially important in regions where women face limited connectivity, low digital literacy, and barriers to technical leadership.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence can support women's empowerment, but only when inclusion, fairness, and accountability are built into the technology from the start. The 2026 evidence shows that AI is already shaping women's opportunities and risks in education, work, safety, and governance. At the same time, it shows that bias, underrepresentation, and weak regulation remain serious barriers to equitable outcomes. The paper concludes that AI must be governed as both a technical and social system. Future research should examine sector-specific applications, policy effectiveness, and the experiences of women who use AI in everyday life.

REFERENCES

1. Aksar, I. A., Firdaus, A., Gong, J., & Anwar Pasha, S. (2024). Examining the impacts of social media on the psychological well-being in a patriarchal culture: A study of women in Pakistan. *Online Information Review*, 48(2), 294–313.
2. Al Shehab, N., & Hamdan, A. (2021). Artificial intelligence and women empowerment in Bahrain. In *Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Business, Education and Healthcare* (pp. 101–121).

3. Chaurasia, S. A., Deshpande, S. G., Amlani, N. R., Shelke, N., Bhende, D. O., Yasmeen, Z. M. J., & Chourasia, S. A. (2024). Impact of education, training, and innovation input on artificial intelligence technology for women's empowerment. In *AI Tools and Applications for Women's Safety* (pp. 219–231).
4. Ding, W., Abdel-Basset, M., Hawash, H., & Ali, A. M. (2022). Explainability of artificial intelligence methods, applications and challenges: A comprehensive survey. *Information Sciences*, 615, 238–292.
5. GATE. (2026, February 1). Recommendations on gender equality, the digital space and the age of artificial intelligence. <https://gate.ngo/knowledge-portal/publication/download-gate-recommendations-on-gender-equality-the-digital-space-and-the-age-of-artificial-intelligence>
6. IndiaAI Mission & UN Women. (2026). Real-world impact of AI and gender empowerment. <https://india.un.org/en/311003-real-world-impact-ai-and-gender-empowerment>
7. Portell Fonolla, S., et al. (2026). Artificial intelligence applications supporting women's career development: A scoping review. Retrieved from R Discovery.
8. UNESCO. (2026). UNESCO and W4EAI South Asia Chapter hosts "Women in AI" panel at the India AI Impact Summit 2026. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-and-w4eai-south-asia-chapter-hosts-women-ai-panel-india-ai-impact-summit-2026>
9. UN Women. (2026, June 21). AI is getting women wrong as gender bias persists, data reveals. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/06/1167776>
10. UN Women. (2026). Casebook on the real-world impact of AI for gender empowerment. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2026/07/casebook-on-real-world-impact-of-ai-in-gender-empowerment>