

Original Research Article

## Reimagining Well-Being: The Human-AI Frontier

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### Article History

Received: 05.12.2023

Accepted: 23.12.2023

Published: 26.12.2023

### Journal homepage:

<https://www.easpublisher.com>

### Quick Response Code



**Abstract:** This paper investigates this complex interplay between artificial intelligence (AI) and human well-being, covering mental health, work-life balance, and ethical government. Adopting a qualitative research approach, it encompasses a literature review and ten semi-structured interviews of students, teachers, IT professionals, and researchers. The findings illustrate AI's double-edged nature: It deepens access to support systems and improves efficiency while also increasing stress, isolation, and burnout among professionals. Ethical implications, including data privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency, are increasingly well-understood, yet remain insufficiently addressed within practice. Interviewees expressed distrust in current regulatory mechanisms and called for greater public awareness and simpler, more locally relevant governance models. Contrasting strategies from India's development-focused approach to international principles like GDPR and IEEE's frameworks highlight the gap between theory and application. This research addresses key population and methodological gaps in AI studies by amplifying diverse lived experiences and advocating for context-sensitive, ethically grounded AI governance.

**Keywords:** AI, Well-being, Mental Health, Work Life Balance.

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## INTRODUCTION

The ascent of artificial intelligence (AI) to the upper pantheon of the general-purpose technologies makes it the defining technology of our time, its transformative potency comparable to that of steam and electricity (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2017). Its penetration triggers a cascade of complementary innovations that redesign key processes in almost every single industry simultaneously (Howard, 2019). Machine Learning (ML), a key subfield of AI, has enabled machines to eventually learn from data and perform well for many tasks at superhuman precision (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). This technological explosion holds great potential for proactive economic development and social change (Siau & Wang, 2020). But as AI systems filter more and more into the fabric of life, their impact on human welfare naturally merits sober attention.

Human well-being is a complex construct that includes objective material conditions as well as subjective internal states like life-satisfaction (McGillivray & Clarke, 2006; Alartartseva & Barysheva, 2015). This paper will explore the ramifications of AI across these dimensions, with an emphasis on three of these planes about which we are most concerned: those

relating to mental health, work-life balance, and the intersection of ethical questions about privacy, autonomy, and social justice.

The key argument of this article is that the proliferation of AI has both positively and negatively affected human well-being. It has developed powerful technologies that can enhance human abilities, and at the same time, has unleashed system-level forces that threaten to undermine human welfare and worsen existing inequalities. The promise of AI in achieving inclusive growth involves shifting the conversation from a purely technical or market-driven focus to one based on responsible governance, ethical design, and human rights (Mathiesen, 2014).

### Significance

This research underscores the critical importance of humanizing AI by focusing on mental well-being, ethical design, and inclusive governance. Through amplifying various user experiences, identifying disconnects between policy and practice, it offers valuable input for more responsible and contextually sensitive AI deployment.

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## Historical and Theoretical Context

### Historical Context

The correlation between AI and well-being is rooted in decades of technological progress and social change. AI traces back to the middle of the last century, when people like Alan Turing laid the intellectual foundation for the technology. Early attempts at AI from the 1950s to–1970s, such as ELIZA (1966) and MYCIN (1970s), pursued symbolic reasoning and rule-based expert systems. These models were good at doing things they were designed to do, but couldn't learn or generalize beyond what they were programmed to do. The 1980s and 1990s saw a paradigm shift with the development of statistical machine learning, which shifted the focus from hand-engineered algorithms to those that are able to learn and recognize patterns from the data. This trend accelerated during the 2010s when research on deep learning and neural networks led to milestones like AlexNet (2012) in image recognition, and later, natural language models such as word2vec (2013) and BERT (2018). These technologies widened the scope of AI applications in healthcare, education, communication, and workplace automation. In 2020, AI was tightly integrated into our daily lives via virtual assistants, content-filtering algorithms, facial recognition, and predictive analytics. This period also saw rising trepidation over AI's effects on mental health, job loss, data privacy, and algorithmic bias, particularly as AI systems were increasingly employed in sensitive areas such as law enforcement, hiring, and education. The COVID-19 pandemic further accentuated both dependence on AI technologies and concerns about their long-term societal consequences. So, by 2020, AI ceased to be primarily a technical or economic concern and became a cultural and ethical one as well, a subject that called for reflection about its effect on human well-being.

### Theoretical Context

The study of AI's impact on human well-being draws upon multiple theoretical frameworks across disciplines. In psychology and development studies, well-being is understood as encompassing both objective indicators (e.g., income, health, access to services) and subjective experiences (e.g., life satisfaction, autonomy, emotional security) (McGillivray & Clarke, 2006; Alartartseva & Barysheva, 2015).

From an ethical standpoint, scholars have focused on aligning AI with human rights, privacy, and fairness. Mathiesen (2014) underscored the importance of human dignity in digital systems, while frameworks such as *Privacy by Design* and the IEEE's *Ethically Aligned Design* (2019) advocate for embedding ethical values within the architecture of AI technologies. These frameworks emphasize transparency, accountability, and sustainability, echoing calls for "human-centric AI."

In the sociotechnical tradition, AI is approached as both a technological system and a social force.

Structuration theory (Giddens) offers insight into how AI systems mediate, reproduce, or challenge social structures, particularly in work environments governed by algorithmic management. Theories of surveillance capitalism, meanwhile, highlight how AI-driven platforms commodify personal data and influence behaviour at scale, often without users' full awareness or consent.

These perspectives reveal that AI is not a neutral tool, but a system embedded with social, cultural, and political values. Understanding its impact on well-being thus requires an interdisciplinary lens that integrates ethics, policy, psychology, and systems thinking.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptualizing AI and Human Well-being

Artificial Intelligence is a broad discipline that involves enabling machines to perform tasks that require cognitive abilities (Wang, n.d.). Recent progress is mainly driven by Machine Learning, in which machines learn from data, rather than from explicit programming (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). Human wellbeing is therefore a parallel and rather all-encompassing concept used to describe a state of being that is broader than GDP and incorporates both non-economic conditions of life and a sense of contentment and well-being (subjective happiness) (McGillivray & Clarke, 2006). Understanding a way of life involves the factors of ability and disability, needs and their fulfilment, social relationships, and the exercise of agency.

### AI's Impact on Mental Health

The digital era has revolutionized human interactions, which directly affects mental health. AI-based systems may facilitate intimacy and social support via new modes of communication that enhance well-being (Lomanowska & Guitton, 2016). And yet, this increase in connectedness does not necessarily lead to an increase in meaningful connection but to feelings of being "alone together" (Lomanowska & Guitton, 2016). The potential drawbacks of AI-driven hyper-personalization include social polarization, alienation between humans, reduced human-to-human interaction, and a decline in social trust and empathy (Leslie, 2019). Digital environment also brings threats to people, such as cyber-harassment, which is detrimental to mental health (Lomanowska & Guitton, 2016).

### AI's Impact on Work-Life Balance

AI is a new factor of production that is transforming labour markets (Korinek & Stiglitz, 2019). Its biggest challenge is not that it is expected to stimulate growth. Skill-replacing automation leads to a reduction in demand for human labour, which in turn lowers wages and increases income inequality (Korinek & Stiglitz, 2019). And beyond job displacement, AI will change the nature of work. AI is automating routine tasks in areas such as law and HR (Tambe *et al.*, 2019). It also avails

itself to new methods of invasive surveillance. Permeating work and domesticity, Algorithmic management and worker surveillance can result in a loss of privacy and increased stress, a sense of depersonalisation, and blur boundaries between work and private life (Howard, 2019).

**Ethical Concerns and Governance**

The application of AI systems involves serious ethical issues. Many responsible innovation frameworks focus on Fairness, Accountability, Sustainability, and Transparency (FAST) (Leslie, 2019).

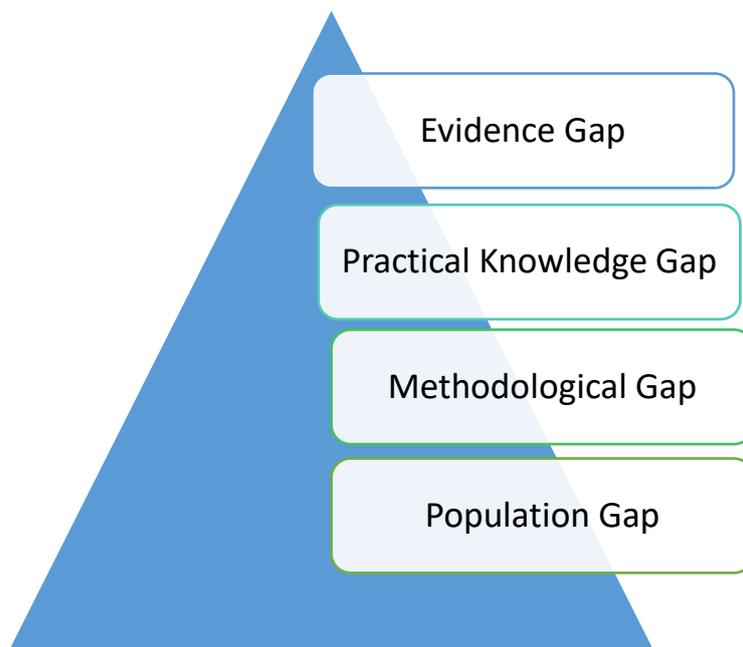
**Privacy and Autonomy:** The nature of AI’s use of big data generates inherent conflict with the human right to privacy (Mathiesen, 2014). Privacy aside, mass surveillance and indiscriminate data collection infringe upon fundamental freedoms and violate the dignity of the individual. In reaction, there is increasing worldwide consensus that there is a strong need for robust privacy principles and frameworks such as ‘Privacy by Design’ (Siau & Wang, 2020). Moreover, as AI comes to wield decision-making authority over life-and-death matters, it can also produce a “lack of accountability,” where the models are simply too opaque to challenge. This calls for governance that prioritizes transparency, explainability, and keeping humans in control (Leslie, 2019; IEEE, 2019).

**Inequity and Bias:** There is a danger that AI systems will further entrench biases in society. For example, if algorithms used for hiring or law enforcement are trained on biased historical data, they can perpetuate egregious outcomes, which is referred to as algorithmic injustice (Tambe *et al.*, 2019). To counter this, fairness must be baked in through every step of the AI journey (Leslie, 2019).

**Global Views:** These difficulties are well understood, and nations and international entities are crafting governance approaches. Emerging economies such as India are prioritising AI for shared prosperity to solve fundamental problems (NITI Aayog, 2018). In contrast, the UN blades AI with the SDGs, emphasising collaboration on a global scale (International Telecommunication Union, 2020). These macro approaches are further enhanced by principle-based frameworks derived from institutions such as the IEEE (2019) that aim to consider ethical values within the very design of a system.

**Research Gap**

Several lacunae are observed in academic literature with regard to the interface between AI and human well-being. These gaps can be conceptualized as a pyramid of four levels, moving from large oversights in populations studied to more focused gaps in empirical data.



**Fig1: Pyramid of Research Gap**

**Research Gap**

To understand the relationship between AI and human well-being, several critical research gaps emerge, forming a four-tiered pyramid:

- **Population Gap**

Most studies focus on developed nations like the US and EU, while underrepresented populations such as gig workers, the elderly, and children remain largely ignored.

There is little empirical research on how AI affects the well-being of these vulnerable groups, especially in low-income settings.

- **Methodological Gap**

Existing research is often siloed by discipline. There is a lack of integrated, mixed-method studies that combine macro-level policy analysis with micro-level lived experiences. Longitudinal studies tracking real-

world outcomes of AI on well-being are almost non-existent.

- **Practical Knowledge Gap**

Stakeholders developers, educators, and policymakers struggle to apply high-level ethical frameworks in practice. While principles like “fairness” or “human-centric AI” are widely discussed, actionable guidance for implementing them remains limited.

- **Evidence Gap**

Despite many AI governance models, little comparative evidence exists on their actual effectiveness. We lack data on whether current strategies, from rights-based regulations to development-led initiatives, truly enhance well-being or reduce harm.

This study addresses the population and methodological gaps by combining literature synthesis with primary interviews across diverse user groups. By foregrounding lived experiences, it offers context-rich, qualitative insights into the real-world ethical and well-being impacts of AI, an area where empirical evidence remains sparse.

### Research Questions

- How have advancements and proliferation of AI affected fundamental aspects of human well-being, such as mental health and work-life balance, at a global level, including developed and developing countries?
- What are the key ethical challenges privacy, autonomy, and social inequality prompted by AI applications, and how do the recommended national and international governance frameworks address them in a human-centric way?

### Research Objectives

- To study the complex impacts of AI on mental health and work-life balance through synthesizing literature on AI-mediated communication, workplace automation, and algorithmic management.
- To critically evaluate the core ethical concerns of AI-driven systems, to compare the solutions offered for responsible governance, contrasting rights-based, development-focused, and global-cooperative approaches.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design that integrates both secondary and primary data sources. Given the complex and evolving nature of AI’s interaction with human well-being, a qualitative approach enables an in-depth, interpretive understanding of lived experiences and broader policy frameworks.

### Data Sources

#### Secondary Data (Literature Review)

A semi-systematic literature review was conducted to map the current academic, policy, and ethical discourse on AI and human well-being. Sources included:

- National policy documents (e.g., NITI Aayog, 2018)
- International reports (e.g., ITU, 2020; WHO, 2021)
- Peer-reviewed journals in economics, ethics, education, psychology, and technology studies
- Technical frameworks from organizations such as the IEEE and the Alan Turing Institute

#### Primary Data (Interviews)

To complement the literature and capture lived experiences, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. The sample included:

- 2 IT professionals
- 2 university teachers
- 2 PhD scholars
- 2 postgraduate students
- 2 undergraduate students

Interviews were conducted online and lasted 20–30 minutes each. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to represent a diversity of experiences across sectors and education levels.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent and later transcribed. Data were analysed using thematic coding, aligning emerging patterns with the main focus areas from the literature:

- AI’s dual impact on mental health and work-life balance
- Ethical concerns, including privacy, autonomy, and social inequality
- Governance and trust perceptions

Codes were grouped into overarching themes and cross-compared with findings from the literature to enhance analytical depth.

#### Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, who were briefed about the study’s purpose, anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Responses were anonymised using participant codes (e.g., P1, P2). Ethical practices were followed per institutional research guidelines.

#### Limitations

While the study offers important insights, it is subject to several limitations:

- The interview sample is small and not statistically representative
- Findings may not generalise beyond the immediate participants’ context

- Given the rapid evolution of AI, the analysis reflects conditions at the time of writing and may require future updates

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Dual Side of AI on Mental Health and Work-Life Balance

The increasing presence of AI in our lives promises new forms of support but also creates new sources of stress, isolation, and emotional drain. Interview participants shared experiences that reflect these opposing effects. One of the undergraduate participants (P3) shared, "I tried talking to an AI bot during lockdown. It seemed useful at first, but in the end, I just wanted a real person to talk to." A university teacher (P4) added, "My students are constantly online, sending messages late at night. But emotionally, many of them seem distant. It's like the more connected they are, the more alone they feel." These stories mirror Lomanowska and Guitton's (2016) insights on how digital proximity can undercut genuine human connection.

Blurred lines between work and personal life were another concern. A software engineer (P1) noted, "AI has improved our workflow, but now there's an unspoken pressure to be available all the time. It's hard to unplug." Similarly, a Master's student (P9) explained, "Using AI tools helps with my studies, but the pace of updates is stressful. I always feel like I'm falling behind." These accounts resonate with Howard's (2019) argument that algorithm-driven work environments increase mental strain.

Concerns over job security due to automation also surfaced. A PhD scholar (P8) admitted, "With how fast AI is evolving, I sometimes wonder if the topic of my thesis will still matter in a few years." These reflections call for thoughtful policy interventions to balance AI's advantages with its impact on mental and professional well-being.

### Ethical Challenges and Governance Responses

Themes of fairness, transparency, and accountability emerged across the interviews, echoing long-standing academic debates. Yet participants pointed out that these values often remain abstract.

A developer (P2) shared, "We learn about ethics, sure but once you're in a real project, deadlines take over. Ethics ends up being just another box to tick." A university teacher (P5) reflected, "India's AI policy sounds great in theory, but it hasn't reached the classrooms or the communities. Many people I work with have never even heard of it." These remarks reflect concerns raised by scholars like Siau & Wang (2020) and Leslie (2019), who argue that ethical

AI principles struggle to translate into everyday practice.

A PhD scholar (P7) emphasized, "If ethics isn't built into the system from the start, it's already too late. We need practical guidelines that both developers and users can understand." This points to a rising demand for inclusive, actionable, and design-integrated ethical frameworks.

### Trust, Awareness, and Regulation

Skepticism around AI regulations was widespread. A Master's student (P6) commented, "I don't really know what happens to my data. I just accept the terms without reading. Who has the time or clarity for all that?" An undergraduate student (P10) echoed, "These apps know more about me than I do. But no one ever taught us how to understand what's going on behind the screen."

These candid responses reflect a wider digital literacy gap. Despite existing frameworks, users often feel left out of the conversation, unaware of their rights or the mechanisms protecting them. The findings point to a need for user-centric regulation, transparent data practices, and better public engagement on digital safety.

### Contrasting Models of AI Governance

Participants had mixed views on AI governance. Some acknowledged the ambition of India's developmental approach, while others questioned its accessibility.

A university teacher (P4) remarked, "Frameworks like the GDPR offer important protections, but they're hard to understand for most people. We need policies that are local, practical, and written in a language people use." This view reinforces the call for grounded governance that resonates with local contexts.

Academic literature supports this complexity. India's strategy highlights inclusive growth (NITI Aayog, 2018), while global models like the UN's SDG-aligned frameworks (ITU, 2020) stress cooperation. Technical bodies such as IEEE (2019) offer value-laden design principles, yet these remain difficult to implement without tangible support structures.

Altogether, the interviews support the research landscape but also expand it, revealing real voices behind abstract policies. They underline the need for adaptive, participatory, and ethically conscious AI governance that reflects people's everyday realities.

## CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence's penetration of the social fabric reflects a technology of deep duality. It has the power to dramatically improve the lives of humans by creating efficiencies, enhancing human capacity, and addressing the most pressing issues of the world. But the development and application of AI have also sparked

powerful countervailing forces that risk the decay of mental health, erode work-life structure, and lay the foundation for a host of new vectors of unethical practice and social unfairness.

Indeed, as this paper has shown, the impact of AI is not pre-determined. The results for human welfare hinge upon the decisions of policy-makers, technologists, and citizens. The findings show that the impact of AI on mental health is multi-faceted, having the potential to connect people but also isolate them. In the realm of work, A.I. disrupts labour markets: It fosters fears of job displacement and even the prospect of escaping drudgery. These core issues of privacy, autonomy, and fairness are not merely technical obstacles but go to the heart of ensuring AI-based systems respect human dignity and rights.

The emerging models of governance around the world - from India's developmentalist national strategy, at one end, to the collective, SDG-centred vision of the UN and the provisioning approach of the values-infused ethical design frameworks - share a common recognition: AI demands constant and careful navigation. A strictly market-led approach won't be enough to ensure that AI will work for the good of all. The road ahead will demand a technology diplomacy, a copious legal and regulatory infrastructure, and a steadfast dedication to humanized reflexes throughout the innovation lifecycle. If the digital age is going to be a time of flourishing, it is going to be because we have managed to reassert human well-being as the supreme value in our design for machines, for our systems, and for our societies.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW DETAILS

### 1. Interview Sample Composition

A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted to supplement the literature review with lived experiences of AI’s impact on well-being. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and included the following:

Participant Code	Role	Mode
P1	IT Professional	Online
P2	IT Professional	Online
P3	Undergraduate Student	Online
P4	University Teacher	Online
P5	University Teacher	Online
P6	Master’s Student	Online
P7	PhD Scholar	Online
P8	PhD Scholar	Online
P9	Master’s Student	Online
P10	Undergraduate Student	Online

### 2. Interview Format

- ❖ **Type:** Semi-structured interviews
- ❖ **Mode:** Conducted over Google Meet
- ❖ **Duration:** 20–30 minutes each
- ❖ **Consent:** Informed verbal consent was obtained before each interview
- ❖ **Confidentiality:** All identities have been anonymised using participant codes

### 3. Interview Focus Areas

- ❖ Impact of AI on mental health and emotional well-being
- ❖ Work-life balance in digitally augmented environments
- ❖ Awareness and perceptions of AI ethics, data privacy, and governance
- ❖ Trust and digital literacy
- ❖ AI’s influence on academic, professional, and personal life

**Cite This Article:** Tausif Biswas & Banshari Koley (2023). Reimagining Well-Being: The Human-AI Frontier. *East African Scholars J Edu Humanit Lit*, 6(12), 600-606.