مجلة الخدمة الاجتماعية

# From Casework to Algowork: Artificial Intelligence and the Reimagining of Social Workers' Roles, Skills, and Professional Competencies

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** In January 2025, the Future of Jobs Report issued by the World Economic Forum highlighted that artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies will bring about profound transformations in the global labor market. These shifts are expected to result in the disappearance of certain occupations and the emergence of others that require new skills, thereby reshaping the very nature of work worldwide. Social work is not exempt from these transformations, as practitioners face both challenges and opportunities that necessitate a redefinition of professional roles, practices, and competencies that are in alignment with the demands of the digital age.

**Objective**: In the contemporary era, social work is undergoing profound transformations driven by the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, which have reshaped the nature of jobs, modes of practice, and requirements for professional competencies. Against this backdrop, the present study is guided by a central question: How will AI reshape the future of social work employment, through the transition from traditional Casework to what can be termed Algowork—a form of professional practice increasingly mediated by algorithms and data? The study aims to explore the implications of AI for traditional social work roles, analyze the shifts in patterns of professional intervention and practice, and anticipate the future skills and competencies required to adapt to intelligent work environments.

**Findings of the study**: The findings revealed that artificial intelligence (AI) contributes to expanding the scope of social work, enhancing the quality of its services, improving the accuracy of assessments, and increasing the efficiency of professional interventions. However, these advancements simultaneously pose complex ethical and skill-related challenges.

**Recommendation**: The study underscores that addressing such challenges requires urgent action from academic and professional institutions, including the integration of AI-focused courses into social work curricula, the development of specialized training programs to build practitioners'

digital capacities, and the design of professional policies that ensure the responsible use of intelligent technologies in social work practice.

**Keywords**: Social Work, Artificial Intelligence, Future of Jobs, Algorithmic Work, Digital Transformation, Professional Skills, Social Work Practices.

## INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

The contemporary world is witnessing rapid transformations in the structure of the economy and labor markets as a result of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies. These intelligent tools have become an integral part of both daily and professional life, reshaping labor markets and redefining the skills required for survival and competitiveness.

AI, as a rapidly evolving field, plays a significant role in revolutionizing a wide range of sectors, including finance, education, healthcare, and transportation. Through the use of algorithms and AI models, it is now possible to perform tasks that traditionally required human cognitive abilities, enabling machines to operate with greater intelligence and autonomy (Mhlanga et al., 2023).

It is noteworthy that on January 16, 2023, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, devoted substantial attention to the rise of AI, particularly the natural language processing model ChatGPT. The tool was described as a powerful and creative assistant capable of enhancing creativity across domains. Subsequently, on January 7, 2025, the Forum issued its Future of Jobs Report, which emphasized that AI and digital technologies have already produced—and will continue to produce—profound changes in the future of work worldwide. The report estimated the creation of 170 million new jobs by 2030, alongside the elimination of nearly 92 million jobs, leading to a net gain of approximately 78 million positions (World Economic Forum, 2023).

In this regard, Al Mubarak (2023) examined the critical issues associated with work-based learning in the era of Industry 5.0, with a particular focus on human–machine interactions. The study argued that this new stage does not seek to replace humans with technology, but rather to strengthen integration between the two, thereby generating tangible improvements in

efficiency and productivity, while also enhancing job security and skill development. However, realizing these benefits requires addressing legal, psychological, and ethical challenges at the managerial level to ensure the optimal use of advanced technologies. The study concluded that balancing human and technological capital constitutes a cornerstone for achieving sustainable development and improving quality of life through the application of AI and robotics in future work environments (Al Mubarak, 2023).

Similarly, the study by Morandini et al. (2023) examined the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on workers' skills within organizations, with particular emphasis on strategies for reskilling and upskilling. The study highlighted that the integration of AI technologies can lead to the automation of numerous human tasks and the reduction of cognitive workload, thereby enhancing efficiency and productivity. At the same time, however, these changes raise concerns about job displacement and training challenges. The findings emphasized that organizations are required to adopt comprehensive strategies to identify the transversal skills needed to adapt to these transformations, and to design targeted training programs that support employees in acquiring new competencies while improving existing ones. Moreover, the study underscored the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates technical and social sciences to fully understand the implications of AI for the labor market.

These findings are consistent with those of Abdelraouf (2025), who demonstrated that the integration of AI has contributed to reducing the time and effort spent on routine tasks, thereby allowing greater focus on analytical and creative activities. Nonetheless, the study identified critical challenges, including algorithmic bias, the limited representation of Arabic content in databases, and difficulties in distinguishing between Arabic dialects. These limitations reduce the accuracy and effectiveness of AI outputs in educational contexts within the Arab world.

Social work, as a human-centered and interaction-based profession, is not immune to such transformations. Rather, the need to rethink the roles and future practices of social workers has become increasingly pressing. It is worth noting that social work has a long history of engagement with

technology. As early as February 1970, the first article addressing the profession's response to technological advancements was published in the Journal of Social Casework (later Families in Society) by Theron K. Fuller. The article advocated the use of computers in social work practice to manage client files, avoid duplication of services, and enhance practitioners' efficiency in delivering care. From the 1970s through the end of the twentieth century, social work remained preoccupied with how best to integrate technology into both education and practice (Ibrahim, 2023;2025).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In recent years, there has been an increasing body of research addressing the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in social work and its implications for education, practice, and professional competencies.

Asakura et al. (2020) introduced an AI-driven simulation platform utilizing natural language processing (NLP) as a pedagogical innovation in social work education. Their study highlighted the potential of such tools to enhance learning and training, while acknowledging certain technical limitations, and called on educators to further explore AI-supported pedagogies in the future.

Similarly, Goldkind (2021) emphasized that AI encompasses a wide range of algorithmic capacities, such as computer vision, natural language processing, and affective computing. However, the study also noted that AI applications often reproduce structural inequalities, particularly in sensitive domains such as risk management, criminal justice, and child welfare. The author argued that the value-based foundation of social work positions contribute meaningfully to the development of algorithmic policies and practices that safeguard vulnerable populations.

In a related discussion, Morgan (2021) examined the challenges facing social care in aging societies, particularly the financial pressures and rising costs associated with increased life expectancy. While much of the debate has focused on economic and funding concerns, Morgan highlighted the relative neglect of the sociological transformations brought about by emerging technologies, raising important questions about the role of AI and

robotics in elder care and the fundamental shifts they may introduce to human relationships and social care practices.

From a different angle, Yin (2021) addressed the limitations of traditional social work services, such as weak information exchange, inefficient resource allocation, and low service quality. The study showed that the Internet Plus model improved some of these issues but continued to face challenges in volunteer and service management amid rising demand. Yin suggested that incorporating machine learning could deepen the Internet Plus Social Work model by optimizing service scheduling and volunteer management, thereby opening promising pathways for the future of practice.

In higher education, Hodgson et al. (2022) argued that AI represents a transformative revolution that will fundamentally reshape teaching and learning, not simply through the integration of digital tools but through a reconfiguration of pedagogy itself. They emphasized the need to rethink the knowledge and skills imparted to students, including social students, to prepare them for a digital labor market, stressing that these shifts intersect with the ethical and relational dimensions central to social work.

From an administrative perspective, Guo and Ma (2022) proposed an intelligent management system for social work based on an improved genetic algorithm. Divided into several modules, including data collection, analysis, load balancing, and storage, the system was shown to enhance both efficiency and service quality. Their findings suggest that integrating intelligent algorithms could represent a promising direction for ensuring sustainability and specialization in social work management.

At the professional level, Meilvang (2023) analyzed how Danish social workers respond to the rise of AI through a process of “boundary work,” which simultaneously legitimizes and critiques technological adoption. This process has redefined the profession’s position within the welfare state, reinforced boundaries between social work and other occupational groups, and articulated a new professional project in light of technological change.

Reamer (2023) concentrated on the emerging ethical issues raised by AI in social work, including informed consent, client autonomy, privacy, transparency, algorithmic bias, and misdiagnosis. He argued that these challenges require the development of clear professional strategies and ethical guidelines to ensure the responsible application of intelligent technologies in practice.

In the field of education, Stone (2023) examined the potential of generative AI to support student learning during practice placements. While highlighting its capacity to provide innovative teaching tools, she stressed that AI cannot replace human interaction, which remains a cornerstone of social work education. Stone called for greater awareness among students and educators regarding the responsible use of AI as part of preparing for future careers.

Along similar lines, Dey (2023) argued that AI opens new frontiers for innovation in social work practice by enabling data analysis, insight generation, and automated community organization. Generative models such as ChatGPT, she suggested, can enhance creativity and professional practice, provided their use remains aligned with the ethical values of the profession.

Singer et al. (2023) explored the integration of AI models—particularly ChatGPT—into social work education and practice, highlighting both their advantages and limitations. The study offered recommendations for strengthening the pedagogical and research applications of AI and envisioned potential pathways for the profession in an AI-driven future.

Building on this, Ibrahim et al. (2023) investigated the role of intelligent chatbots, especially ChatGPT, in social work education. Their study discussed how these tools can support teaching and learning processes, despite challenges to effective use. The findings indicated that AI chatbots can foster critical thinking, academic interaction, and self-directed learning among students when used as supportive tools.

Goldkind et al. (2024) further emphasized that the emergence of ChatGPT marks a turning point in conceptualizing the future of the profession, evoking both excitement and concern. They noted that social work has historically underinvested in technological innovations, positioning AI as both an opportunity and a challenge, and urged practitioners to participate in global debates to ensure fair and ethical adoption.

Within the Arab context, Khalaf (2024) conducted an empirical study measuring the awareness of Egyptian social work faculty members regarding the ethical implications of AI in education. Surveying 172 academics, the study found a pressing need to enhance ethical awareness and recommended the implementation of training programs and institutional policies to ensure responsible integration of AI into social work education.

Most recently, Li et al. (2025) provided a systematic review of AI applications in social work case management. Reviewing eight empirical studies, they found that machine learning and NLP were the most frequently used techniques, applied in decision-making, client identification, risk prevention, and service monitoring. While these applications remain in their early stages, the review concluded that AI-assisted case management demonstrates promising potential to improve professional efficiency and service delivery.

Building on this growing body of literature, the present study introduces the concept of Algowork to describe the emerging forms of professional practice in social work that are increasingly shaped, mediated, and even governed by algorithms. Whereas the literature often refers to “algorithmic management” or “algorithmic decision-making,” the notion of Algowork centers on the lived professional experiences of social workers as they navigate algorithm-mediated practices, decisions, and interventions.

Against this backdrop, the current paper seeks to shed light on the implications of AI for social work by examining how it reshapes professional roles, transforms practices, and redefines the competencies required for the future. It further aims to conceptualize the challenges and opportunities these transformations present for academics, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To analyze how artificial intelligence contributes to reshaping traditional social work functions and to identify the emerging hybrid roles that integrate intelligent technologies with the human dimension.
2. To explore the anticipated transformations in the professional roles and functions of social workers resulting from rapid digital change.
3. To identify the fundamental shifts in professional practice skills required of social workers, while anticipating the future competencies needed to adapt to intelligent work environments.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How does artificial intelligence contribute to reshaping traditional social work functions and transforming them into hybrid roles that integrate human and machine capabilities?
2. What are the major anticipated transformations in the professional roles and functions of social workers in the context of the digital revolution and artificial intelligence?
3. What kinds of transformations are expected to occur in the professional practice skills of social workers in the age of artificial intelligence?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Type of Study and Methodological Approach:** This study adopted a descriptive–analytical approach, drawing on the Future of Jobs Reports issued by the World Economic Forum, as well as recent scholarly work addressing the impact of artificial intelligence on social professions. In addition, a foresight-based perspective was employed to explore the potential transformations in social workers' roles, practices, and professional skills.

**Population and Sample:** The target population of this study consisted of scholarly literature and international reports related to the future of jobs and artificial intelligence within social and educational domains. The sample comprised the Future of Jobs Reports (editions 2020–2025), alongside peer-reviewed academic studies indexed in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar that specifically addressed AI and social work. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select the most relevant studies and reports aligned with the research objectives.

**Data Collection Tools:** The study relied primarily on document analysis as the key data collection tool. This involved systematic analysis of the Future of Jobs Reports and prior research to extract indicators relevant to transformations in professional functions and roles. Furthermore, a systematic literature review was conducted, classifying the selected studies under the main thematic categories of roles, practices, skills, ethics, and relationships with service users.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

### Findings Related to the First Research Question: How Will Artificial Intelligence Reshape Traditional Social Work Functions into Hybrid Roles?

1. Profound impact on social work occupations: Social professions will be significantly affected by automation and digital transformation, with many traditional tasks shifting toward hybrid roles that combine human and machine capacities.
2. Redefinition of professional skills: Social work will increasingly require a new blend of competencies, including digital skills (e.g., data analysis, platform management) alongside soft skills (e.g., critical thinking, emotional intelligence).
3. Transformations in professional practices: Conventional practices such as direct counseling and paper-based assessments will evolve

into digital practices supported by AI, including behavioral prediction systems and virtual counseling platforms.

4. Emergence of new occupational roles: Novel positions will arise, such as social data analyst, technology ethics consultant, and digital intervention specialist, necessitating the redesign of educational curricula and training programs.
5. Growing ethical and legal dimensions: Greater emphasis will be placed on professional ethics, data protection, and privacy, requiring the formulation of legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure the responsible use of intelligent technologies.
6. Reshaping professional relationships with service users: Interactions between social workers and clients will become increasingly virtual and less traditional, demanding new tools to build trust and maintain professional credibility.
7. Sustainability and lifelong learning: Professional skills will no longer be sufficient for a lifetime; instead, continuous learning and ongoing retraining will become essential for sustaining professional competence.
8. Strengthened interdisciplinary collaboration: Social workers will need to collaborate closely with technology experts, data scientists, and policymakers to co-develop integrated solutions for emerging social challenges.
9. Increasing reliance on big data: Social work will evolve into a more evidence-driven practice, relying on big data and algorithmic insights to identify trends and inform more precise decision-making.
10. Redefining professional identity and mission: The profession will move beyond its traditional boundaries toward new roles focused on digital community empowerment, safeguarding vulnerable groups in digital environments, and promoting social justice in the age of AI.

**Findings Related to the Second Research Question: What Transformations Are Expected in the Professional Roles and Functions of Social Workers?**

The study identified a wide range of emerging and future-oriented roles for social workers in the age of artificial intelligence, reflecting the

hybridization of professional practice with digital and algorithmic tools. These include:

1. **Digital Social Worker:** Provides counseling and advisory services through virtual platforms, utilizing AI tools and augmented reality technologies.
2. **Social Data Analyst**: Analyzes community and client data using AI-driven data analytics to identify trends and design evidence-based interventions.
3. **AI Ethics Consultant in Social Work**: Ensures adherence to ethical and human-centered standards in the use of AI systems within social institutions.
4. **Digital Interventions Specialist**: Designs and implements intervention programs through apps and online platforms, such as virtual counseling systems or AI-powered chatbots for mental health and social support.
5. **Smart Social Learning Coordinator**: Manages training and capacity-building programs for individuals and communities using AI-supported learning systems.
6. **AI & Social Work Researcher**: Investigates the implications of AI for professional practice and social policy, while proposing innovative intervention models.
7. **Digital Protection Specialist for Vulnerable Groups**: Focuses on safeguarding vulnerable populations (children, elderly, persons with disabilities) from digital risks such as cyberbullying and data misuse.
8. **Digital Justice Coordinator**: Addresses issues of the digital divide and ensures marginalized populations have equitable access to digital services.
9. **Virtual Rehabilitation Specialist**: Employs virtual and augmented reality technologies to support psychological, social, and behavioral rehabilitation.
10. **Digital Well-being Advisor**: Helps individuals and communities achieve a healthy balance between technology use and daily life.

11. **Community AI Program Manager**: Leads community-focused AI initiatives and projects aimed at improving quality of life and social services.
12. **Social Cybersecurity Specialist**: Protects clients' personal data and addresses risks such as cyberbullying, fraud, and online harassment.
13. **Social Digital Solutions Developer**: Designs and develops applications or platforms tailored to the needs of social work beneficiaries.
14. **Technology Integration Specialist in Social Work**: Assists social institutions in embedding smart and digital solutions into their daily operations.
15. **Community Digital Literacy Trainer**: Raises public awareness—particularly among vulnerable groups—about safe and effective technology use.
16. **AI Social Policy Advisor**: Contributes to the formulation of public policies concerning AI use in social contexts, ensuring fairness and justice.
17. **AI-based Social Foresight Specialist**: Applies AI-driven forecasting tools to anticipate social changes and plan for future interventions.
18. **Smart Social Networks Specialist**: Manages the use of AI-enabled social networks to provide support, guidance, and combat misinformation.
19. **Social Work Labor Market Analyst**: Tracks AI-driven transformations in the social work labor market and recommends new training programs and skill sets for practitioners.
20. **Digital Inclusion Specialist**: Ensures that highly vulnerable groups (e.g., elderly, people with disabilities) gain access to digital services and foster their integration into digital society.

**Findings Related to the Third Research Question: What Transformations Are Expected in Professional Practice Skills of Social Workers in the Age of Artificial Intelligence?**

Traditionally, social work has been rooted in human-centered skills such as professional relationships, active listening, appreciation, and empowerment. With the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), however, a dual

transformation is emerging: some traditional skills will be redefined, while entirely new competencies will be required. Overall, social work skills will not disappear; rather, they will evolve from being "exclusively human" into a blend of human, digital, and ethical competencies. In the age of AI, social workers will be expected to be (1) more human in emotional engagement and empathy, (2) more digital in managing data and technologies, and (3) more ethical in guiding the responsible use of technology. The findings can be categorized into three groups:

**1. Traditional Skills Reframed Through AI:**

- **Active Listening:** Expands beyond face-to-face dialogue to include interpreting digital communication data and analyzing interactions with AI-driven chatbots.
- **Empowerment and Strengths Perspective**: Supported by digital tools to measure individual capacities and resources, with a stronger emphasis on digital empowerment.
- **Advocacy**: Extends to digital advocacy through smart platforms and data-driven campaigns.
- **Problem-Solving**: Informed by predictive AI tools to forecast outcomes and identify the most effective interventions.
- **Assessment**: Transforms from manual, paper-based evaluations to data-driven assessments leveraging big data and algorithms for risk detection and needs forecasting.

**2. New AI-Driven Skills:**

- **Digital Literacy in Social Work**: Understanding intelligent systems and mastering digital analytic tools as core competencies.
- **Social Data Management**: Skills in collecting, analyzing, and safeguarding large-scale client data.
- **AI Ethics Competence**: Ability to critically evaluate the ethical use of technologies and prevent algorithmic bias or harm to vulnerable populations.
- **VR/AR Intervention Skills**: Using immersive virtual and augmented reality platforms to support counseling, training, and psychosocial rehabilitation.

- **Digital Resilience**: Capacity to adapt quickly to ongoing technological changes and embrace lifelong learning as a professional necessity.

**3. Soft Skills of Growing Importance:**

- **Critical Thinking**: To evaluate algorithmic outcomes critically rather than accepting them as absolute truths.
- **Emotional Intelligence**: Maintaining human distinctiveness in empathy and emotional understanding, which machines cannot replicate.
- **Adaptive Leadership**: Leading hybrid (human–machine) teams in social work contexts.
- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**: Working effectively with technologists, data scientists, and policymakers to co-create solutions.
- **Digital Risk Management**: Detecting and responding to threats such as cyberbullying, data breaches, and digital exploitation in professional contexts.

## STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded with a set of recommendations directed to decision-makers, which can be summarized as follows:

| No | Recommendation | Implementation Mechanisms |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Redesign social work education programs | • Introduce specialized university courses in *social data analysis* and *AI in social work*.<br>• Train faculty members on VR/AR technologies for integration into fieldwork training.<br>• Establish technology labs in schools of social work to pilot and apply intelligent tools. |

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| **2** | Promote lifelong learning for social workers | • Create national e-learning platforms for continuous professional training.<br>• Require professional associations to develop annual digital transformation training plans.<br>• Provide professional incentives (e.g., accreditation points or career promotions) for those engaged in lifelong learning programs. |
| **3** | Integrate ethical and legal dimensions into training and practice | • Include an "AI Ethics" course in social work curricula.<br>• Organize regular workshops in collaboration with legal and technology experts.<br>• Develop a "Digital Professional Code of Conduct" issued by professional associations. |
| **4** | Encourage partnerships between universities and technology institutions | • Sign collaboration agreements with global and local tech companies.<br>• Launch joint applied research projects to develop intelligent tools for social interventions.<br>• Establish university incubators to support students and researchers in creating digital solutions. |
| **5** | Develop national and institutional digital qualification platforms | • Establish a national digital training platform in collaboration with ministries of Higher Education, Social Development, and ICT.<br>• Introduce digital professional certification for social workers.<br>• Build monitoring and evaluation systems to measure readiness for intelligent work environments. |
| **6** | Integrate AI into field training in social work | • Use AI-powered simulation platforms to train students.<br>• Develop interactive training apps to enhance assessment and intervention skills.<br>• Employ VR/AR technologies in field training for safe, realistic experiences. |
| **7** | Strengthen digital research capacity for social workers | • Offer specialized courses in big data analysis. - Use AI tools to extract patterns from social data.<br>• Encourage publication of applied research that employs AI in social work. |

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| **8** | Enhance interdisciplinary collaboration | • Create joint task forces between social workers and technology experts.<br>• Develop community projects led by multidisciplinary teams.<br>• Introducing joint curricula between social work and technology departments. |
| **9** | Develop strategies to protect vulnerable groups in digital environments | • Launch national programs to address cyberbullying and digital violence.<br>• Design protocols for safeguarding client data privacy.<br>• Train social workers in rapid response mechanisms for digital abuse cases. |
| **10** | Foster a culture of digital innovation in social work | • Encourage social workers to design technological solutions to social problems.<br>• Allocate awards and incentives for innovative digital practices.<br>• Create platforms for sharing best practices among professionals. |

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the future of jobs in social work, with particular attention to the transformation of roles, practices, and professional skills. Drawing on the Future of Jobs Reports and contemporary academic literature, the findings highlight that social work, as a human-centered profession, is not immune to the sweeping transformations of the digital age.

The results demonstrate that AI is contributing to a fundamental reconfiguration of social work practice. Traditional roles are being reshaped into hybrid functions that integrate human empathy with algorithmic intelligence, while new positions—such as digital social workers, social data analysts, and AI ethics consultants—are emerging. Similarly, professional skills are shifting from being exclusively human toward a

blend of human, digital, and ethical competencies, underscoring the need for continuous learning, digital literacy, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The study also emphasizes the critical ethical and legal challenges posed by AI adoption in social work, including concerns around privacy, algorithmic bias, and responsible data use. Accordingly, the recommendations presented call for integrating AI-focused courses into social work education, strengthening lifelong learning mechanisms, developing ethical and legal frameworks, and fostering partnerships between academia, technology sectors, and policymakers.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data sources, particularly international reports and academic literature, which may not fully capture local and cultural variations in AI adoption. Future research could benefit from empirical studies that examine the lived experiences of social workers engaging with AI tools, comparative studies across different sociocultural contexts, and evaluations of pilot projects that integrate AI into social work practice and education.

In conclusion, this research reinforces the urgency of preparing social workers for a rapidly evolving labor market shaped by digital transformation. By adopting proactive strategies in education, training, and policy, the profession can harness the opportunities offered by AI while safeguarding its ethical commitments and human-centered mission.

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