ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOCIAL WORK (AI): MODERN ETHICAL CONCERNS

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Abstract

The study explores the ethical concerned surrounding AI integration in social work, using a mixed-methods approach, combining literature review, expert interviews and case studies. The findings review that AI-driving tools can perpetuate bias, compromise client confidentiality and undermine human centered practice, but also offer opportunities of enhanced service delivery and improved outcomes. To address these the concerns study recommends prioritizing transparency in AI decision making processes, ensuring diverse data sets, establishing accountability mechanism and providing ongoing AI ethics training for social workers. Ultimately, the integration of AI in social work requires careful consideration of ethical implication to promote effective, equitable and human centered services.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, social work, Christian ethics, machine learning, technology, values

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has reached a new level of sophistication. AI has the potential to transform social work and enhance the profession's ability to serve clients, organizations, and communities. AI can be used in clinical, administrative, advocacy, and policy contexts in social work. It can enable social workers to analyze data quickly in ways that lead to meaningful services and interventions, risk assessment, outcomes forecasting, and efforts to address systemic bias in the delivery of social services.

At the same time, AI comes with noteworthy ethical challenges, especially related to issues of informed consent and client autonomy; privacy and confidentiality; transparency; client misdiagnosis; client abandonment; client surveillance; plagiarism, dishonesty, fraud, and misrepresentation; algorithmic bias and unfairness; and use of evidence-based AI tools (Frackiewicz, 2023; Plante, 2023; Rubeis, 2022; Tambe & Rice, 2018; Terra, et al., 2023).

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, social work does not yet offer practitioners and educators an in-depth exploration of key ethical challenges related to the use of AI. The purpose of this article is to examine ethical issues related to social workers' use of AI; apply relevant ethical standards; and outline a strategy for social workers' ethical use of AI.

The Development and Nature of Artificial Intelligence

The term artificial intelligence was originated in 1955 by Stanford University professor John McCarthy. AI leverages computer science and data to simulate human-like intelligence, enabling diverse problem-solving applications. AI includes what is known as machine learning, which uses historical data to predict and shape new output. The term "generative AI" refers to the creation of images, videos, audio, text, and 3D models by using learning patterns from existing data to generate new outputs. The European Commission (2019) has defined AI as follows:

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions – with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals. AI-based systems can be purely software-based, acting in the virtual world (e.g. voice assistants, image analysis software, search engines, speech and face recognition systems) or AI can be embedded in hardware devices (e.g. advanced robots, autonomous cars, drones or Internet of Things applications)

AI can take the form of expert systems, natural language processing, speech recognition, and machine vision. AI depends on algorithms to enhance machine learning, reasoning, self-correction, and creativity. In health care generally, AI has been used to diagnose disease, facilitate patient treatment, automate redundant tasks, manage medical records, provide customer service using chatbots, reduce dosage errors, provide robot-assisted services, analyze patient scans, and detect fraud (Rong, et al., 2020).

More specifically related to social work, the field of affective computing, also commonly referred to as emotion AI, is a subfield of computer science originating in the 1990s (Luxton, 2016; Royer, 2021). AI relies primarily on machine learning, computer vision, and natural language processing. Machine learning software is designed to enhance accuracy in diagnosing mental health conditions and predicting client outcomes. Computer vision analyzes images and nonverbal cues generated by clients, such as facial expression, gestures, eye gaze, and human pose to analyze clients' communications. Natural language processing entails speech recognition and text analysis to simulate human conversations via chatbot computer programs, and to create and understand clinical documentation.

Social Work applications of artificial intelligence

To develop ethics guidelines specifically for social workers, it is important to appreciate the diverse ways in which AI is being used in the profession and in allied behavioral health professions. This context will inform the development of ethics-based protocols. In clinical social work, the context in which AI has been especially prominent, this technology is being used to conduct risk assessments, assist people in crisis, strengthen prevention efforts, identify systemic biases in the delivery of social and behavioral health services, provide social work education, and predict social worker burnout and service outcomes (Asakura, et al., 2020; Frackiewicz, 2023; Gillingham, 2019; Grządzielewska, 2021; Jacobi & Christensen, 2023; Keddell, 2019; Lanier, et al., 2020; Liedgren, et al., 2016; Molala & Mbaya, 2023; Rice, et al., 2018; Schneider & Seelmeyer, 2019; Sobjerg, 2022; Tambe & Rice, 2018). For example, the Trevor Project has partnered with Google.org to launch The Crisis Contact Simulator, a counselor training tool powered by AI. The model simulates digital conversations with LGBTQ youths in crisis and enables counselors to experience realistic practice conversations before taking live ones.

Woebot, a therapeutic chatbot that offers an automated therapist, is another AI behavioral health tool. Woebot uses natural language processing and learned responses to simulate therapeutic conversation, remember the content of past sessions, and deliver advice around mood and other struggles.

Wysa is an AI service that responds to the emotions individuals express using evidence-based cognitive behavioral techniques, DBT, meditation, breathing, yoga, and motivational interviewing to assist people. Pyx Health offers an app that is designed to communicate with people who feel chronically lonely. The Heyy app gives users access to self-assessments, research-backed resources on emotional well-being as well as links to behavioral health professionals for intensive therapy. ChatGPT offers people nearly instant suggestions of ways to address their distress, such as ways to increase relaxation, focus on sleep, reduce caffeine and alcohol consumption, challenge negative thoughts, reduce high-risk behaviors, and seek the support of friends and family.

Social workers who serve military personnel and veterans have access to AI tools designed specifically for these unique client populations. For example, the PTSD Coach app is a mobile application designed to help veterans and service members manage symptoms of PTSD. The app provides a variety of tools and resources to assist users in coping with PTSD symptoms associated with military service, including anxiety, depression, and sleep issues. It offers an interactive self-assessment tool that helps users track their symptoms over time, and it provides strategies to manage symptoms when they occur. The app also includes audio-guided relaxation exercises and a virtual coach that can help users develop coping skills and set personal goals. In addition, it provides access to resources such as crisis hotlines, support groups, and other helpful websites.

The AIMs (Anger and Irritability Management Skills) app is a mobile application designed to help veterans and military service members manage feelings of anger and irritability. The app provides a variety of tools and resources to help users identify triggers for anger and develop strategies for managing their emotions. It offers a self-assessment tool to track anger symptoms over time, as well as interactive exercises to teach relaxation techniques and problem-solving skills. Users can also create a personalized anger management plan, setting goals and strategies to manage their anger in specific situations. The app also provides a journaling feature to track progress and identify areas for improvement. Users can learn skills to improve communication, strengthen relationships, and reduce stress levels.

Mindfulness Coach is an app that provides a variety of guided mindfulness exercises that can be tailored to individual needs and preferences. It offers a range of exercises, including body scans, breathing exercises, and guided meditations, which can help users reduce stress, manage anxiety, and improve overall well-being. Users can set reminders to practice mindfulness throughout the day, track progress over time, and customize exercises to suit their needs. The app can customize mindfulness exercises to specific needs, such as managing symptoms of PTSD, depression, or anxiety. The app also provides resources and guidance to help users develop a mindfulness practice that can be incorporated into their daily routine.

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Annie mobile app is a Short Message Service (SMS) text messaging tool that promotes self-care for veterans. Clients using Annie receive automated prompts to track and monitor their own health and motivational/educational messages. The Annie App for Clinicians allows social workers and other behavioral health professionals to use and create care protocols that allow clients to submit their health readings back to Annie. Messages and patient data are stored in the Annie system where clinicians can view the texts and readings as needed.

At the programmatic level, predictive analytics, or the use of data for forecasting service successes and challenges, can help agencies understand how best to allocate scarce resources. For example, DataKind, a data science volunteer corps, has worked with food pantries to use historical data and machine learning algorithms to predict a client's level of dependency on the pantry. By mining data, the organization can prioritize resources to avert a crisis of food insecurity before it escalates (Goldkind, 2021). As another example, the Chicago Data Collaborative mines data to understand the inner workings of the criminal justice system by pooling data from participating institutions and organizations in the Chicago metropolitan area. Members and partners seek out data from public agencies to create a public portrait of the criminal justice system, which the collaborative makes available on its Web site (Goldkind, 2021).

key Ethical issues and considerations

various key ethics-informed resources are available to support social workers in navigating the use of technology, including AI, in the work place. These guidelines focus on three distinct, albeit related, domains: (1) practice standards, (2) regulatory and licensing standards, and (3) code of ethics standards. In 2013 the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) board of directors appointed an international task force to develop model regulatory standards for technology and social work practice. ASWB embarked on development of new ethics-related standards in response to demand from regulatory bodies around the globe for guidance concerning social workers' evolving use of technology. The ASWB task force included representatives from prominent social work practice, regulation, and education organizations throughout the world. The task force developed standards for social workers who use digital and other electronic technology to provide information to the public, deliver services to clients, communicate with and about clients, manage confidential information and case records, and store and access information about clients. The group developed model standards, including extensive ethics guidelines related to technology use, addressing seven key ethics-related concepts: practitioner competence; informed consent; privacy and confidentiality; boundaries, dual relationships, and conflicts of interest; records and documentation; collegial relationships; and social work practice across jurisdictional boundaries. These model standards, formally adopted in 2015, are now influencing the development of licensing and regulatory laws around the world (López Peláez & Kirwan, 2023), along with various efforts in other nations (British Association of Social Workers, 2018; Diez, 2023; Pascoe, 2023).

In 2017, key social work organizations in the US came together in a historic collaboration—the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), and Clinical Social Work Association (CSWA)—the profession formally adopted new, comprehensive practice standards, including extensive ethics guidelines that focused on social workers' and social work educators' use of technology (NASW, CSWE, ASWB, & CSWA, 2017). Approved by these respective organizations' boards of directors, these transformational, comprehensive standards address a wide range of compelling ethical issues related to social workers' use of technology to provide information to the public; design and deliver services; gather, manage, and store information; and educate social workers. Further, in 2017, NASW adopted a revised code that includes extensive technology-

related additions pertaining to informed consent; competent practice; conflicts of interest; privacy and confidentiality; sexual relationships; interruption of services; unethical conduct of colleagues; supervision and consultation; education and training; client records; and evaluation and research.

Social workers who are contemplating using AI should draw on these prominent guidelines and address a number of key ethical considerations related to informed consent and client autonomy; privacy and confidentiality; transparency; client misdiagnosis; client abandonment; client surveillance; plagiarism, dishonesty, fraud, and misrepresentation; algorithmic bias and unfairness; and use of evidence-based AI tools. These key ethics concepts should be reflected in ethics-informed protocols guiding social workers' use of AI.

Respecting client autonomy through informed consent

Social workers ensure clients understanding benefits and risks through informed consent. (Barsky, 2019; Reamer, 2018a, 2018b, 2023a). When using AI, practitioners should inform clients of relevant benefits and risks and respect clients' judgment about whether to accept or decline the use of AI. According to the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2021), "social workers who use technology to provide social work services should obtain informed consent from the individuals using these services during the initial screening or interview and prior to initiating services. Social workers should assess clients' capacity to provide informed consent and, when using technology to communicate, verify the identity and location of clients" (standard 1.03).

Protecting sensitive information

Social workers must protect client data gathered via AI with stringent security protocols. Social workers have a duty to ensure that the AI software they are using is properly encrypted and protected from data breaches to the greatest extent possible. Social workers must take steps to prevent inappropriate access to AI-generated data by third-parties, for example, vendors who sponsor the AI software social workers use. According to the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2021), "social workers should take reasonable steps to protect the confidentiality of electronic communications, including information provided to clients or third parties. Social workers should use applicable safeguards (such as encryption, firewalls, and passwords) when using

electronic communications such as e-mail, online posts, online chat sessions, mobile communication, and text messages" (standard 1.07).

Accountability

Social workers using AI should religiously adhere strictly to traditional informed consent principles notifying clients about potential unauthorized disclosure of their protected health information, for example, as a result of computer hacking or failed online or digital security. According to the technology standards adopted by NASW, ASWB, CSWE, and CSWA (2017), "regardless of the precautions that social workers take to ensure that client records are gathered, managed, and stored in a secure manner, confidential electronic records may be breached. Social workers should comply with ethical standards and relevant federal and state laws regarding any duty to inform clients about possible breaches of confidentiality. Social workers should also develop policies and procedures detailing how they would inform clients regarding breaches of confidentiality" (standard 3.05).

Diagnostic errors affecting clients

Clinical social workers leveraging AI for behavioral health assessments must mitigate risks of misdiagnoses through robust digital protocol design. This may occur when social workers do not supplement their AI-generated assessments with their own independent assessments and judgment. Misdiagnosis may lead to inappropriate or unwarranted interventions which, in turn, may cause significant harm to clients and expose social workers to the risk of malpractice lawsuits and licensing board complaints (Reamer, 2023a). According to Yan, Ruan, and Jiang (2023), "current AI is still far from effectively recognizing mental disorders and cannot replace clinicians' diagnoses in the near future".

Negligence of client

Social workers leveraging AI for client communication must prioritizes prompt responses. To use the legal term, social workers must take steps to avoid "abandoning" clients who use AI to communicate significant distress. In malpractice litigation, abandonment occurs when practitioners do not respond to clients in a timely fashion or terminate services in a manner

inconsistent with standards in the profession. For example, a client who communicates suicidal ideation via AI, does not receive a timely response from their social worker, and attempts to die by suicide yet lives, may have grounds for a malpractice claim. According to the NASW *Cofde of Ethics* (2021), "social workers should take reasonable steps to avoid abandoning clients who are still in need of services. Social workers should withdraw services precipitously only under unusual circumstances, giving careful consideration to all factors in the situation and taking care to minimize possible adverse effects. Social workers should assist in making appropriate arrangements for continuation of services when necessary"

Monitoring of Client

AI increases vulnerability to unauthorized data surveillance by external parties. For example, social workers who provide reproductive health services to clients in states where abortion is illegal must be cognizant of the possibility that prosecutors will subpoena electronically stored information (ESI) generated by AI to prosecute pregnant people who seek abortion services and the practitioners who assist them in their decision making. Although ESI in social workers' possession has always been discoverable during legal proceedings, there is a newer challenge when ESI includes information generated by AI (for example, information about reproductive health generated by chatbots used by clients and social workers). A client or social worker who uses AI to search online for abortion-related information services creates a digital trail (Reamer, 2023b). According to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, ESI is defined as any documents or information that are stored in electronic form (Yeazell, et al., 2022).

Misrepresentation, dishonesty, plagiarism and fraud

AI helps social workers quickly access job-related insights. For example, social workers may use ChatGPT to produce content that may be useful in grant applications, program evaluations, advocacy efforts, and fundraising appeals. Social workers who take advantage of this powerful AI tool must be sure to cite their sources and comply with "fair use" doctrine to avoid allegations of plagiarism, dishonesty, fraud, and misrepresentation (Keegan, 2023). Although using content from ChatGPT is not necessarily plagiarism, it is possible that ChatGPT incorporates content

from other authors whose work should be cited (Pocock, 2023). Social workers who use AI should comply with prevailing ethical standards (NASW, 2021):

Social workers should not participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud, or deception. (standard 4.04)

Social workers should take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed and to which they have contributed. (standard 4.08)

Social workers should honestly acknowledge the work of and the contributions made by others. (standard 4.08)

Algorithmic unfairness and discriminatory bias

Reliance on AI machine learning, which utilizes extensive data sets that may not accurately represent social workers, clients poses a risk of algorithmic bias. This bias can assessment, interventions and treatment plans, particularly vulnerable or protected categories such as race, ethnicity gender, sexual orientation and gender expression. Algorithmic bias can manifest itself when AI is used as part of social service agency recruitment, online marketing, and facial recognition, among other tools. According to Lee, Resnick, and Barton (2019), "because machines can treat similarly-situated people and objects differently, research is starting to reveal some troubling examples in which the reality of algorithmic decision-making falls short of our expectations. Given this, some algorithms run the risk of replicating and even amplifying human biases, particularly those affecting protected groups."

Moral use of AI-driven tools in evidence-informed approaches

The development of AI technology I accelerating quickly. Social workers using AI have an ethical obligation to stay updated on best practices and adjust their approaches accordingly. A key resource is the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence. This organization's code of ethics is consistent with traditional social work values. According to the technology standards adopted by NASW, ASWB, CSWE, and CSWA (2017), "technology is constantly evolving, as is its use in various forms of social work practice. Social workers should

keep apprised of the types of technology that are available and research best practices, risks, ethical challenges, and ways of managing them".

AI ethical use policy

Protocols for ethics based AI design and implementation have emerged in recent years. These include a series of concrete steps social workers can take to increase the likelihood of compliance with prevailing ethical standards (Gattadahalli, 2020):

Create a framework for ethics driven decision-making

This framework helps make informed, responsible and ethical decision that respects stakeholders rights and promote trust. Key principles include:

- The AI technology does no harm. AI developers should take steps to protect clients and other members of the public they serve.
- The AI technology is designed and developed using transparent protocols and auditable methodologies.
- That AI tools collect and treat client data to reduce biases against population groups based on race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, religion, and other potential sources of bias.
- Clients are informed of known risks and benefits of AI technologies so they can make informed decisions about its use.

Setup a digital ethics governance board

Organizations that integrate AI into social work practices would benefit from establishing multidisciplinary digital ethics governance board. Thee would bring together expert from various fields to ensure that AI driving solution are design and implemented in ways that prioritize human well-being, dignity and social justice. AI technology, and prevailing ethical standards and best practices. This committee would have oversight responsibilities related to the design and implementation of AI.

Organize inclusive decision groups

By convening diverse focus groups, organizations can make more informed decisions, drive innovation and build stronger relationship with stakeholders.

Submit algorithms for expert review

This processes improves AI performance, reduces risks, builds trust and enhances decision making. Expert reviewers may include social workers familiar with AI, researchers, educators, and diverse groups of data scientists.

Simulate AI model performance

This process improves model accuracy, reliability and decision making while minimizing costs and risks.

Create AI user guides for social workers

This process enables social workers to leverage AI technology to improve their practice and better serve their clients.

Design training programmes for stakeholders on changes

A well-designed message strategy is crucial for social workers and clients to understand the benefits and risks of AI in health care enabling clear and coherent communication. An effective communication and training protocol directed to all relevant parties, both within and outside of social workers' employing organizations, is essential.

Document test outcomes

Document test outcomes aids track progress, identifying areas for improvement and inform feature decisions.

Social work and Christian ethics intersect in several ways:

Compassion and empathy, selective to others, social justice and respect for human dignity. Many social workers draw inspiration from their faith including Christianity, Muslim to inform their practice and values.

Method Used

The study used a review of existing literature on Ai in social work, including it's applications, benefits and challenges.

Findings

In the findings, it highlights the need for Ethical framework: Developing and implementing Ethical frameworks to guide Ai use in social work. Transparency and explainability, Ensuring Ai-driven decisions are transparent and explainable. Human oversight: providing human oversight to prevent Ai-driven errors and biases.

Recommendations

In other to address ethical concerns, surrounding Ai in social work, l recommend thus: Developing Ai literacy: Educating social workers on Ai's potential benefits and limitations. Establishing clear guide lines for Ai use in social work. Encouraging transparency. Encouraging transparency and explainability in Ai- driven decision-making processes.

Conclusion

As AI adoption grows in social work and other professions, practitioners face numerous ethical challenges, including; informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, algorithmic bias, misdiagnosis, transparency misuse and misinterpretation. Responsible AI use is crucial to mitigate these risks.

Social workers should take proactive steps to protect clients and themselves. First, they should familiarize themselves with AI protocols and the various ways in which they can be used in their social work practice settings. Second, social workers should review relevant ethical standards

and practice standards pertaining to their use of AI and ensure that their practice settings are in compliance. Third, social workers in positions of authority should design and implement training for staffers regarding the appropriate and ethical use of AI in their work setting. Fourth, social work education programs should incorporate content on AI in their curricula to ensure that the next generation of social workers uses AI responsibly. Social work organizations that sponsor continuing education should also offer workshops and webinars for practitioners who may not have been introduced to this content during their formal social work education. Finally, social work educators, researchers, and practitioners should take diligent steps to evaluate the impact of AI in the profession, focusing especially on evidence of effectiveness, limitations, algorithmic bias, and compliance with pertinent ethical standards.

Early social worker pioneers likely couldn't envision the profession's modern landscape, here technology enables remote service delivery, expanding reach and accessibility for client, enter client information in electronic records stored in the "cloud," and address clients' needs using AI, among other digital and electronic tools. The emergence and proliferation of AI is yet another reminder that social work ethics challenges and related standards evolve.

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