



Interrogating Emerging Gender Issues in the Context of a Rapidly Changing World

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Abstract: This study examines emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world shaped by globalization, technological innovation, climate change, shifting labour markets, and evolving social norms. It explores contemporary challenges, including digital gender-based violence (GBV), artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic bias, climate-induced vulnerabilities, unpaid care work, intersectionality, and changing gender identities. A rapid literature review and critical synthesis methodology were adopted. Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and books published primarily between 2018 and 2025 were systematically identified through searches of Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and reports from international organisations, including UN Women, the International Labour Organisation, UNESCO, and the World Economic Forum. Studies were selected based on relevance, quality, and contribution to emerging gender debates. Guided by intersectionality theory, decolonial feminist perspectives, and gender-transformative approaches, the review finds that gender inequalities persist despite global commitments towards the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 5, 10, 13, and 16. Women perform over 76% of unpaid care work, contributing an estimated US\$10.8 trillion annually in unrecognised economic value, while global gender parity may still require 134 years to achieve. Digital GBV, AI-driven bias, climate change, and the underrepresentation of women in STEM continue to reinforce structural inequalities. The study recommends intersectional policymaking, feminist AI governance, recognition of unpaid care work, gender-responsive climate action, and greater inclusion of Global South perspectives to accelerate sustainable gender equality.

Keywords: Emerging, Gender Issues, Intersectionality, Digital Gender-Based Violence, Climate Change, Artificial Intelligence.

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1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is characterized by unprecedented social, economic, technological, political, and environmental transformations that are fundamentally reshaping gender relations across the world. Globalization, digitalization, artificial intelligence (AI), demographic transitions, migration, climate change, geopolitical instability, and changing labour markets have simultaneously expanded opportunities for gender inclusion while creating new

forms of exclusion and inequality (UN Women, 2025; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2025). Consequently, gender is no longer understood solely as a question of equal rights between women and men but as a dynamic social construct influenced by intersecting identities, technological innovation, environmental change, and evolving governance systems. These transformations have intensified scholarly interest in emerging gender issues that extend beyond conventional concerns of education, employment, and political participation to encompass digital safety, algorithmic discrimination,

climate justice, unpaid care work, gender-diverse identities, and epistemic inequalities (Ben Brik & Brown, 2024; OECD, 2025).

Despite more than three decades of international commitments following the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, progress towards gender equality remains slow and uneven. The Global Gender Gap Report 2025 estimates that, at the current pace, global gender parity will require approximately 134 years to achieve, with substantial disparities persisting across economic participation, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health outcomes (WEF, 2025). Similarly, UN Women (2025) reports that women continue to undertake approximately 76% of unpaid care and domestic work worldwide, representing an estimated US\$10.8 trillion in unrecognised annual economic value. Comparative evidence from systematic reviews further demonstrates that although high-income countries have narrowed gender gaps in education and labour-force participation, women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), occupying only about 28% of the global STEM workforce, while leadership positions continue to be dominated by men (UNESCO, 2025; OECD, 2025). These findings illustrate that traditional indicators of gender equality inadequately capture emerging inequalities associated with technological advancement and structural power relations.

Recent systematic reviews have shifted attention towards digital transformation as one of the most significant drivers of contemporary gender inequalities. Reviews synthesising evidence from Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America consistently report that digital technologies simultaneously facilitate women's economic participation, entrepreneurship, education, and political engagement while increasing exposure to cyber-harassment, online gender-based violence (GBV), image-based abuse, misinformation, deepfakes, algorithmic discrimination, and digital surveillance (Berten et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2025). Comparative studies indicate considerable regional variation. For example, women in South Asia experience among the highest levels of technology-facilitated violence globally, with approximately 85% of women internet users in India reporting some form of online harassment, whereas European countries demonstrate comparatively stronger regulatory frameworks but continue to struggle with AI-driven gender bias and digital exclusion among migrant and minority women (UNESCO, 2025). These findings suggest that digital inequalities are increasingly shaped not only by access to technology but also by institutional governance, legal protection, digital literacy, and broader socio-cultural contexts.

Climate change has emerged as another defining gender issue in contemporary scholarship. A growing body of systematic evidence demonstrates that women

disproportionately experience climate-related vulnerabilities because of unequal access to land, finance, education, social protection, and decision-making structures (IPCC, 2023; UN Women, 2025). Comparative analyses show that while climate-related disasters increase economic insecurity globally, women in low- and middle-income countries face significantly greater risks of food insecurity, displacement, gender-based violence, and loss of livelihoods owing to pre-existing structural inequalities. Studies conducted across East Africa, the Sahel, and South Asia consistently demonstrate that drought, floods, and environmental degradation intensify women's unpaid care responsibilities while reducing opportunities for education, formal employment, and political participation (FAO, 2025; Hsieh & Yeh, 2024). These findings reinforce calls for gender-responsive climate governance that integrates adaptation, resilience, and social protection policies.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, emerging gender issues are shaped by the interaction of historical inequalities, patriarchal institutions, demographic change, rapid urbanisation, digital expansion, and environmental vulnerability. Although many African countries have strengthened gender-responsive legislation and constitutional protections, implementation gaps remain substantial (African Union Commission, 2025). Regional comparative studies indicate that women continue to experience lower labour-force participation in formal employment, limited access to productive assets, financial exclusion, and underrepresentation in political and corporate leadership despite notable improvements in girls' educational attainment (Ben Brik & Brown, 2024). Systematic reviews further demonstrate that digital transformation has generated new opportunities for entrepreneurship, mobile banking, and civic participation while simultaneously increasing online harassment and technology-facilitated violence against women, particularly journalists, politicians, and human-rights defenders (Pinney et al., 2023; Sharda et al., 2024). Consequently, scholars increasingly argue that Africa's gender agenda must address both traditional structural inequalities and rapidly emerging technological challenges.

The Kenyan context illustrates many of these intersecting transformations. Kenya has made considerable progress in constitutional gender protections, affirmative action, and gender mainstreaming following the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and the implementation of Vision 2030. Nevertheless, significant disparities remain in political representation, economic inclusion, digital participation, and access to productive resources (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2025). Emerging evidence indicates that women politicians, journalists, and activists increasingly experience cyber-harassment, coordinated online abuse, deepfake manipulation, and digital disinformation campaigns that undermine

democratic participation (Kasera et al., 2025). Similarly, recurrent droughts, flooding, and food insecurity disproportionately affect women, particularly in arid and semi-arid lands, where caregiving responsibilities and dependence on climate-sensitive livelihoods heighten vulnerability (Zahoor & Ogbanga, 2026). These challenges are further compounded by persistent debates surrounding gender identity, reproductive rights, and gender mainstreaming, reflecting tensions between international human-rights frameworks and local socio-cultural and religious values. The Kenyan experience therefore demonstrates how global transformations intersect with local realities to produce complex and evolving gender dynamics requiring context-specific policy responses.

Although an expanding body of literature addresses digital gender-based violence, climate justice, artificial intelligence, unpaid care work, and gender diversity, most studies examine these issues independently within specific disciplinary or geographical contexts. Existing systematic reviews rarely integrate technological, environmental, economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions into a single analytical framework, thereby limiting understanding of how these interconnected transformations collectively reshape gender relations in rapidly changing societies. Moreover, relatively few comparative reviews foreground perspectives from the Global South, where structural inequalities often magnify the impacts of digitalisation and climate change. This fragmentation constrains the development of integrated, evidence-informed gender policies capable of responding to multiple and overlapping forms of inequality.

Against this background, the present study interrogates emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world through a critical synthesis of contemporary global, regional, and local evidence. Drawing upon intersectionality theory, decolonial feminist scholarship, and gender-transformative approaches, the study critically examines how technological innovation, environmental change, socio-economic transformation, and evolving governance structures are reshaping gender relations across diverse contexts. By integrating evidence from recent empirical studies, systematic reviews, and international policy reports, the article provides a comprehensive understanding of emerging gender challenges while identifying critical knowledge gaps and policy priorities. Its principal contribution lies in advancing an integrated analytical framework that connects previously fragmented strands of gender scholarship, amplifies perspectives from the Global South, and offers evidence-informed recommendations for more inclusive, context-sensitive, and transformative gender policies capable of accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 5, 10, 13, and 16 (Okesanya, 2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review of Literature

This study is underpinned by an integrated theoretical framework comprising Liberal Feminist Theory, Intersectionality Theory, Decolonial Feminist Theory, and the Gender-Transformative Approach (GTA). The integration of these perspectives provides a comprehensive lens for interrogating emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world by addressing the limitations of earlier theories while accommodating the complexity of contemporary gender relations shaped by technological innovation, climate change, globalization, and evolving social institutions.

Liberal Feminist Theory, advanced by scholars such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), John Stuart Mill (1869), and Betty Friedan (1963), provides the foundational premise that gender inequality results primarily from discriminatory laws, unequal access to education, employment, and political participation. The theory assumes that equal opportunities and institutional reforms can eliminate gender disparities through legal protection and policy interventions (Tong & Botts, 2024). Its influence is evident in international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. However, critics argue that Liberal Feminism privileges formal equality while inadequately addressing structural power relations, intersecting identities, and historical inequalities experienced by women in diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts (Hooks, 2000; Fraser, 2022). Consequently, the theory offers an important normative foundation but provides only a partial explanation for emerging gender inequalities associated with digital technologies, climate change, and global economic restructuring.

Intersectionality Theory, introduced by Crenshaw (1989, 1991), extends Liberal Feminism by arguing that gender cannot be analysed independently of other dimensions of social identity such as race, class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, and geographic location. The theory contends that multiple systems of oppression operate simultaneously to produce unique forms of marginalisation that cannot be understood through single-axis analyses. Recent systematic reviews demonstrate that intersectionality has become one of the most influential frameworks in gender scholarship because it better explains differential vulnerabilities to digital gender-based violence, climate-induced displacement, unpaid care work, and labour market exclusion across diverse populations (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Hankivsky et al., 2024). Nevertheless, critics observe that intersectionality often provides a powerful analytical framework without offering clear strategies for institutional transformation or policy implementation,

thereby limiting its practical application in addressing structural inequalities.

Decolonial Feminist Theory addresses this limitation by challenging the dominance of Eurocentric feminist knowledge and highlighting how colonial legacies, global power asymmetries, and epistemic injustice continue to shape gender inequalities in the Global South (Lugones, 2010; Mohanty, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatseni, 2021). The theory argues that universal approaches to gender equality frequently overlook indigenous knowledge systems, local experiences, and culturally embedded understandings of gender, resulting in policies that inadequately respond to context-specific realities. Recent scholarship further demonstrates that digital governance, climate adaptation, and artificial intelligence often reproduce colonial patterns of knowledge production by privileging data, technologies, and governance models developed in high-income countries (UNESCO, 2025; UN Women, 2025). While Decolonial Feminism enriches understanding of structural and historical inequalities, it has been criticised for placing greater emphasis on critique than on identifying practical pathways for institutional and behavioural change.

The Gender-Transformative Approach (GTA) complements and strengthens the preceding theories by shifting analytical attention from identifying inequalities to transforming the social norms, institutional structures, and power relations that sustain them (Gupta, 2000; Dworkin et al., 2024). The approach assumes that sustainable gender equality requires changes in policies, governance systems, organisational practices, and social attitudes rather than merely increasing women's participation in existing structures. Evidence from systematic reviews indicates that gender-transformative interventions are more effective than gender-sensitive approaches in reducing gender-based violence, promoting equitable caregiving, enhancing women's leadership, and improving health and development outcomes because they engage both women and men in challenging discriminatory norms (Heise et al., 2019; Dworkin et al., 2024). Unlike earlier theories, the GTA provides an operational framework capable of translating critical gender analysis into actionable policy and programme interventions.

Rather than treating these theories as competing explanations, this study adopts an integrated theoretical framework in which each theory addresses the limitations of its predecessor. Liberal Feminism establishes the normative commitment to equality and rights; Intersectionality explains how multiple identities and systems of oppression shape unequal experiences; Decolonial Feminism situates these inequalities within historical and geopolitical power structures while amplifying Global South perspectives; and the Gender-Transformative Approach provides practical mechanisms for institutional and societal transformation.

Collectively, these complementary perspectives enable a multidimensional analysis of emerging gender issues, including artificial intelligence, digital gender-based violence, unpaid care work, climate justice, and evolving gender identities, within rapidly changing global contexts. The study therefore draws upon the combined assumptions of these theories to argue that contemporary gender inequalities are simultaneously legal, structural, intersectional, historical, technological, and relational, requiring integrated, context-sensitive, and transformative responses capable of advancing sustainable gender equality.

2. Empirical Literature Review

2.1 Emerging Gender Issues in the Context of Global Transformation

Rapid global transformations driven by globalization, digitalization, artificial intelligence (AI), climate change, demographic transitions, migration, and changing labour markets have fundamentally reshaped gender relations worldwide. Rather than producing universally positive outcomes, these transformations have generated uneven opportunities and vulnerabilities across countries, socio-economic groups, and intersecting identities. Contemporary empirical scholarship increasingly argues that gender inequalities are becoming more complex because traditional forms of discrimination are interacting with emerging technological, environmental, and political dynamics (UN Women, 2025; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2025). This observation reinforces the assumptions of Liberal Feminist Theory that legal and institutional reforms remain necessary for promoting equality. However, empirical evidence suggests that formal equality alone has proved insufficient for dismantling deeply embedded structural inequalities, thereby supporting the transition towards Intersectionality Theory and Gender-Transformative approaches that recognise multiple and interacting systems of disadvantage.

Comparative evidence from systematic reviews demonstrates considerable variation in gender equality outcomes across regions despite widespread adoption of international policy frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, gender parity has improved modestly, yet the global gender gap remains only about 68.8% closed, implying that complete parity may require another 134 years if current trends persist (WEF, 2025). Nordic countries consistently outperform most developing economies in political representation, educational attainment, and labour-market participation, while countries experiencing conflict, weak institutions, or economic instability continue to exhibit wider gender disparities.

These findings suggest that institutional quality, governance effectiveness, and social protection systems significantly mediate gender outcomes beyond legislative commitments.

Nevertheless, empirical studies remain divided regarding the principal drivers of gender inequality. Liberal feminist scholars attribute persistent disparities primarily to discriminatory legislation, unequal educational opportunities, and labour-market barriers (Tong & Botts, 2024). In contrast, intersectional scholars argue that gender cannot be isolated from race, ethnicity, disability, class, age, sexuality, and geographical location because these identities interact to produce qualitatively different experiences of privilege and oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Recent systematic reviews support the latter position by demonstrating that women from ethnic minorities, rural communities, displaced populations, and lower socio-economic groups experience significantly poorer outcomes than women from privileged backgrounds even within countries exhibiting relatively high overall gender equality (Hankivsky et al., 2024). Consequently, aggregate national gender indicators often conceal substantial intra-country inequalities.

The growing recognition of these multidimensional inequalities has contributed to the increasing adoption of gender-transformative interventions. Unlike earlier empowerment programmes that focused primarily on improving women's access to education or employment, gender-transformative approaches seek to transform unequal social norms, institutional cultures, and power relations that reproduce inequality (Dworkin et al., 2024). Meta-analyses indicate that gender-transformative programmes achieve significantly better outcomes in reducing intimate partner violence, improving reproductive health, increasing women's economic participation, and promoting shared household decision-making than conventional gender-sensitive interventions (Heise et al., 2019). However, scholars caution that many interventions remain concentrated at community level while neglecting macro-level political and economic structures that sustain inequality, thereby limiting long-term sustainability.

Globalization presents another area where empirical findings remain contradictory. Optimistic perspectives suggest that globalization has expanded educational opportunities, increased female labour-force participation, facilitated international advocacy networks, and enhanced women's political voice through global governance institutions (OECD, 2025). Comparative evidence from East Asia demonstrates that export-oriented industrialisation substantially increased women's participation in manufacturing and higher education during the past three decades. Similarly, digital economies have created new employment opportunities in entrepreneurship, remote work, and

financial inclusion, particularly through mobile technologies.

Critical political economy scholars contend that globalization has simultaneously intensified labour-market precarity, informal employment, wage inequality, and exploitation of female workers within global value chains (Naidoo & Junor, 2025). Women remain disproportionately represented in insecure employment characterised by lower wages, limited social protection, and poor working conditions. International Labour Organization estimates continue to show that women account for approximately 60% of informal employment in low-income countries, while also assuming substantially greater unpaid care responsibilities than men (ILO, 2025). These contradictory findings illustrate that globalization is neither inherently emancipatory nor oppressive; rather, its gendered effects depend upon institutional capacity, labour regulations, education systems, and social protection policies.

The increasing complexity of contemporary gender relations has also challenged conventional binary understandings of gender. Recent comparative studies demonstrate growing recognition of diverse gender identities across Europe, North America, Latin America, and parts of Africa and Asia, particularly among younger populations exposed to higher education and digital media (Jarić & Golubović, 2025). However, this growing recognition has been accompanied by increasing political resistance. Graff and Korolczuk (2024) observe that anti-gender movements have become influential political actors across Europe, Latin America, and Africa by framing gender equality, feminism, and LGBTQ+ rights as threats to national identity, religious values, and family structures. Similar debates have emerged across several African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana, where tensions frequently arise between universal human rights discourses and culturally grounded understandings of gender and sexuality.

These contrasting developments illustrate the relevance of Decolonial Feminist Theory, which critiques the dominance of Western epistemologies in defining universal gender norms while emphasising context-specific understandings of gender justice (Lugones, 2010). Empirical studies increasingly demonstrate that gender policies designed within Global North contexts often fail to account for indigenous knowledge systems, historical experiences, and socio-cultural realities in the Global South (Banerjee & Connell, 2018). Consequently, many scholars advocate for pluralistic and context-sensitive approaches that balance universal human rights principles with locally grounded gender experiences.

Collectively, the empirical evidence demonstrates broad consensus that gender inequalities are becoming increasingly multidimensional, yet considerable disagreement remains regarding the relative importance

of institutional reforms, structural transformation, cultural change, and technological innovation. Existing studies also remain fragmented across disciplinary boundaries, frequently examining globalization, digital transformation, climate change, labour markets, or identity politics independently rather than exploring their interactions. This fragmentation limits understanding of how rapidly changing global systems simultaneously reshape multiple dimensions of gender inequality. Consequently, there remains a need for integrated analyses capable of synthesising these interconnected transformations within a comprehensive theoretical framework. Such a gap provides the foundation for the present study, which adopts an integrated perspective drawing upon Liberal Feminism, Intersectionality Theory, Decolonial Feminism, and the Gender-Transformative Approach to interrogate emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world.

2.2 Digital Transformation, Artificial Intelligence, Climate Change and the Changing Political Economy of Gender

Digital transformation has become one of the defining characteristics of the twenty-first century, fundamentally altering how individuals work, learn, communicate, access public services, and participate in governance. Although digital technologies have expanded opportunities for women's economic empowerment, education, entrepreneurship, and civic participation, empirical evidence increasingly demonstrates that they have simultaneously generated new forms of gender inequality that transcend traditional socio-economic barriers. Contemporary scholarship therefore views digitalisation as both an enabler of inclusion and a mechanism through which existing structural inequalities are reproduced and intensified (UN Women, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). This duality resonates with Liberal Feminist Theory, which advocates equal access to education, employment, and technology, but empirical studies increasingly suggest that equal access alone does not translate into equal outcomes. Consequently, Intersectionality Theory provides a stronger explanatory framework by illustrating how digital opportunities and risks vary according to gender, class, race, disability, age, geographical location, and educational attainment.

Recent systematic reviews consistently demonstrate that women remain disproportionately excluded from the digital economy despite rapid technological expansion. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2025) estimates that approximately 70% of men use the internet globally compared with 65% of women, with the largest gender digital gaps occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. While these differences appear modest at the global level, regional comparisons reveal substantial disparities. In Europe and North America, digital inclusion policies have significantly reduced gender differences in internet access, yet inequalities

persist in digital leadership, advanced technological skills, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence professions (OECD, 2025). Conversely, women in many low-income countries continue to experience multiple barriers to digital participation, including limited access to affordable internet, lower digital literacy, restrictive socio-cultural norms, and unequal ownership of digital devices (UNESCO, 2025). These findings reinforce the intersectional proposition that digital exclusion reflects overlapping forms of structural disadvantage rather than gender alone.

Comparative studies further suggest that digital transformation has produced contradictory outcomes across socio-economic contexts. Research from Scandinavian countries reports that digitalisation has substantially increased women's participation in flexible employment, online entrepreneurship, distance education, and electronic governance, thereby reducing barriers associated with geographical isolation and caregiving responsibilities (OECD, 2025). Similar positive outcomes have been reported among women entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia, where digital financial services and e-commerce platforms have enhanced market access and business growth. In contrast, systematic reviews from Sub-Saharan Africa reveal that the benefits of digitalisation remain uneven because infrastructural deficits, affordability constraints, unreliable electricity, and gendered educational inequalities continue to limit women's participation in digital economies (World Bank, 2025). Consequently, digital transformation has widened opportunities for already advantaged populations while often reinforcing exclusion among marginalised women.

Artificial intelligence (AI) represents one of the fastest-growing dimensions of digital transformation and has become central to contemporary debates on emerging gender inequalities. AI increasingly influences recruitment, credit allocation, healthcare, education, policing, judicial decision-making, and public administration. Liberal feminist scholars initially viewed AI as a potentially neutral technological innovation capable of reducing subjective discrimination through data-driven decision-making. However, empirical evidence increasingly challenges this assumption. Systematic reviews consistently demonstrate that AI systems frequently reproduce existing societal biases because they are trained using historical datasets reflecting unequal social structures (UNESCO, 2025; World Economic Forum, 2025). Consequently, algorithmic decision-making often disadvantages women in employment recruitment, financial lending, insurance assessments, facial recognition technologies, and predictive policing.

Comparative evidence highlights considerable geographical differences in AI governance. European Union countries have adopted regulatory approaches emphasising ethical AI, transparency, accountability,

and algorithmic fairness, while many developing countries continue to rely on imported AI systems designed using datasets that inadequately represent local populations (European Commission, 2025). African scholars argue that such technological dependence reproduces digital colonialism by embedding Western assumptions within AI governance while marginalising African knowledge systems, languages, and social realities (Birhane, 2024). This critique directly reflects the assumptions of Decolonial Feminist Theory, which contends that contemporary technologies frequently reinforce historical power asymmetries by privileging Global North perspectives in knowledge production. Rather than treating AI bias as merely a technical problem, decolonial scholars conceptualise it as an extension of broader structural inequalities embedded within global political economies of technology.

Empirical evidence further indicates that women's underrepresentation in STEM education and AI development exacerbates algorithmic bias. UNESCO (2025) estimates that women constitute only approximately 28% of the global STEM workforce and less than 30% of professionals working directly in artificial intelligence. Comparative studies from North America and Europe attribute these disparities partly to workplace cultures characterised by implicit gender bias, limited mentorship, and unequal career progression opportunities. Similar findings have emerged across African universities, where women remain substantially underrepresented in engineering, computer science, and information technology despite increasing enrolment in higher education (African Union Commission, 2025). Consequently, many scholars argue that achieving gender equality within AI requires not only ethical regulation but also structural reforms addressing educational inequalities, labour-market discrimination, and institutional cultures.

Perhaps the most visible consequence of digital transformation has been the rapid escalation of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). Recent systematic reviews identify cyber-harassment, cyberstalking, image-based sexual abuse, online hate speech, deepfake pornography, doxing, digital surveillance, and coordinated disinformation campaigns as emerging threats disproportionately affecting women and girls (Berten et al., 2025). Comparative evidence demonstrates considerable geographical variation in prevalence but broad consistency in gendered patterns. Studies from India indicate that approximately 85% of women internet users reported experiencing online harassment in 2022, while comparable studies in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada report lower prevalence but similar patterns targeting women journalists, politicians, academics, and activists (UNESCO, 2025). These findings suggest that although prevalence varies across contexts, digital violence increasingly constitutes a global phenomenon affecting

women's freedom of expression, political participation, and psychological well-being.

African evidence reveals similar trends but identifies distinctive contextual drivers. Systematic reviews conducted across Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and Ghana indicate that digital violence frequently intersects with political participation, electoral competition, and gender stereotypes (Pinney et al., 2023). Women occupying leadership positions experience disproportionate levels of coordinated online abuse intended to discourage political engagement and public visibility. In Kenya, empirical studies demonstrate that female politicians, journalists, and human rights defenders are increasingly subjected to cyberbullying, misogynistic disinformation, deepfake manipulation, and threats of sexual violence during electoral processes (Kasera et al., 2025). These findings strongly support Intersectionality Theory by illustrating how gender intersects with political identity, occupation, ethnicity, and public visibility to produce differentiated vulnerabilities. They also expose limitations within existing cybercrime legislation, which often fails to recognise gender-specific dimensions of online violence.

Climate change has similarly emerged as one of the most significant gender issues within contemporary scholarship. Earlier environmental literature largely conceptualised climate change as a gender-neutral phenomenon affecting entire populations equally. However, subsequent empirical research consistently demonstrates that climate impacts are profoundly gendered because women generally possess fewer productive assets, lower incomes, reduced land ownership, limited access to finance, and greater responsibility for household welfare (IPCC, 2023; UN Women, 2025). These structural inequalities amplify vulnerability to drought, floods, food insecurity, displacement, and environmental degradation, particularly within developing countries.

Comparative systematic reviews reveal striking regional differences. High-income countries generally possess stronger adaptive capacities through insurance systems, social protection, climate-resilient infrastructure, and diversified economies. Conversely, women in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and small island developing states remain disproportionately exposed to climate-related risks because livelihoods depend heavily on climate-sensitive sectors such as rain-fed agriculture, fishing, and natural resource extraction (FAO, 2025). Studies conducted in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and Zimbabwe consistently report that prolonged droughts increase women's unpaid labour through greater responsibility for collecting water, fuelwood, and food while simultaneously reducing opportunities for education and income generation (Hsieh & Yeh, 2024). These findings align closely with Intersectionality Theory by demonstrating that climate vulnerability reflects interactions among gender,

poverty, geography, disability, and age rather than environmental exposure alone.

Kenyan evidence reinforces these broader regional patterns. Recurrent droughts in arid and semi-arid counties, including Turkana, Garissa, Wajir, Marsabit, and Kajiado, have intensified women's caregiving responsibilities while increasing food insecurity, migration, and exposure to gender-based violence (Zahoor & Ogbanga, 2026). Nevertheless, several scholars caution against portraying women solely as victims of climate change. Emerging empirical studies increasingly document women's leadership in community-based adaptation, indigenous environmental governance, climate-smart agriculture, and disaster risk reduction programmes across East Africa (FAO, 2025). This emerging evidence challenges earlier vulnerability narratives and supports Gender-Transformative approaches that recognise women as active agents of resilience rather than passive recipients of development interventions.

Labour-market transformation represents another critical dimension of rapidly changing gender relations. Automation, platform economies, remote work, and digital entrepreneurship have altered employment structures globally. Comparative studies demonstrate that while digital labour markets have created flexible employment opportunities benefiting many women, they have simultaneously expanded precarious employment characterised by limited job security, inadequate social protection, and widening income inequalities (ILO, 2025). Women remain overrepresented in informal employment, domestic work, and platform-based service sectors that often lack labour protections. Furthermore, automation threatens occupations disproportionately employing women, including clerical work, retail services, and administrative support.

A persistent finding across empirical literature concerns the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. UN Women (2025) estimates that women continue to perform more than 76% of unpaid domestic and care work globally, generating an estimated US\$10.8 trillion annually in unrecognised economic value. Comparative studies reveal that although Nordic countries have reduced gender disparities through parental leave policies, publicly funded childcare, and flexible employment, women across Africa and South Asia continue to shoulder substantially greater caregiving responsibilities owing to limited social protection systems and entrenched gender norms (OECD, 2025). Liberal Feminist Theory explains these disparities through unequal labour-market opportunities, whereas Gender-Transformative Theory provides a more comprehensive explanation by highlighting the need to transform household power relations, organisational cultures, and state policies that normalise unequal care responsibilities. Empirical evaluations consistently demonstrate that interventions promoting shared

caregiving responsibilities, family-friendly workplace policies, and public investment in care infrastructure generate more sustainable gender equality outcomes than initiatives focusing solely on women's labour-force participation (Dworkin et al., 2024).

Taken together, the empirical literature demonstrates that digital transformation, artificial intelligence, climate change, unpaid care work, and labour-market restructuring constitute interconnected rather than isolated dimensions of emerging gender inequality. While substantial progress has been achieved through technological innovation, legal reforms, and economic development, empirical evidence consistently reveals that these transformations often reproduce existing inequalities unless accompanied by structural, intersectional, and gender-transformative interventions. Nevertheless, current scholarship remains fragmented, with most studies examining these issues independently rather than investigating their cumulative and mutually reinforcing effects. This limitation provides an important justification for integrated analyses capable of explaining how multiple global transformations collectively reshape gender relations across diverse contexts. In this regard, the present study contributes by synthesising these interconnected empirical strands within a unified theoretical framework that advances both scholarly understanding and evidence-informed policy development.

2.3 Changing Gender Identities, Knowledge Production, Critical Synthesis and Research Gaps

The contemporary discourse on gender has progressively shifted from conventional concerns of equality between women and men towards broader debates surrounding gender identities, epistemic justice, political contestation, and the production of knowledge. Unlike earlier feminist scholarship, which predominantly focused on legal equality and women's socio-economic empowerment, recent empirical literature argues that gender is increasingly shaped by globalization, digital communication, migration, transnational advocacy, demographic transitions, and evolving political ideologies (Connell, 2021; Graff & Korolczuk, 2024). Consequently, emerging gender issues are no longer confined to questions of representation or access to resources but increasingly encompass competing understandings of identity, citizenship, rights, and power. This evolution reflects the assumptions of Intersectionality Theory and Decolonial Feminist Theory, both of which reject universalist conceptions of gender by emphasizing that identities are socially constructed, historically situated, and influenced by multiple systems of power.

Evidence demonstrates that understandings of gender identity vary considerably across geographical, cultural,

and political contexts. Comparative studies from Europe, North America, Australia, and parts of Latin America indicate growing public recognition of gender diversity and broader institutional acceptance of non-binary and transgender identities, particularly among younger and more educated populations (Pew Research Center, 2025). In these contexts, legislative reforms, inclusive education policies, and anti-discrimination frameworks have expanded legal protections for gender-diverse individuals. However, systematic reviews also reveal persistent disparities in employment, healthcare, education, and mental health outcomes despite legal recognition, suggesting that institutional reforms alone remain insufficient to eliminate structural discrimination (UNDP, 2025). These findings expose important limitations within Liberal Feminist Theory, which assumes that legal equality naturally translates into substantive equality. Instead, the evidence supports Intersectionality Theory by demonstrating that discrimination persists through complex interactions among gender identity, race, disability, socio-economic status, religion, and migration status.

Contrasting patterns emerge across many low- and middle-income countries, where debates surrounding gender identity often intersect with religious beliefs, cultural traditions, constitutional values, and postcolonial politics. Comparative studies from Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and parts of Asia indicate increasing polarization regarding gender equality, sexuality, and reproductive rights (Graff & Korolczuk, 2024). While women's movements continue advocating for expanded rights and inclusion, conservative political and religious actors increasingly frame gender equality initiatives as external impositions threatening national sovereignty, family values, and cultural identity. Such tensions have been documented in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Poland, and Hungary, illustrating that contemporary gender debates are simultaneously social, political, and ideological. These empirical findings strongly reinforce Decolonial Feminist Theory, which argues that universal gender frameworks often encounter resistance when perceived as privileging Western epistemologies over indigenous cultural knowledge (Brechenmacher, 2025).

Nevertheless, empirical studies remain divided regarding the implications of these tensions. Liberal scholars generally interpret resistance to expanding gender rights as evidence of incomplete democratization and weak institutional protection of human rights. In contrast, decolonial scholars caution against simplistic portrayals of resistance as inherently anti-progressive, arguing instead that many societies seek culturally legitimate pathways towards gender justice that reconcile universal rights with local histories and traditions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). This contradiction remains one of the most contested areas within contemporary gender scholarship. While human rights advocates emphasize universal standards of equality, decolonial scholars argue

that sustainable gender reforms require greater engagement with indigenous knowledge systems, community institutions, and culturally grounded understandings of social justice. Consequently, the literature increasingly advocates context-sensitive approaches rather than universal policy prescriptions.

A closely related empirical theme concerns the politics of knowledge production. Historically, gender scholarship has been dominated by institutions, funding agencies, and academic traditions located in Europe and North America. Bibliometric analyses reveal that although contributions from Africa, Latin America, and Asia have increased substantially during the past decade, the majority of highly cited gender research continues to originate from high-income countries (Müller, Rihoux & Neville, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). This imbalance has significant implications for evidence-informed policymaking because theories and interventions developed in Western contexts frequently shape international development agendas without sufficient consideration of local realities. Decolonial Feminist Theory directly challenges this imbalance by arguing that knowledge production itself constitutes a site of power in which some voices are privileged while others remain marginalized (Lugones, 2010; Mohanty, 2003).

Recent systematic reviews further demonstrate that research priorities within gender studies remain unevenly distributed. Considerable scholarly attention has focused on gender-based violence, education, political participation, and reproductive health, whereas relatively fewer studies examine emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic bias, digital governance, climate justice, cyber violence, platform economies, and epistemic inequalities, particularly within African contexts (UN Women, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). Comparative bibliometric studies similarly reveal that African scholarship often concentrates on traditional development concerns including maternal health, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and agricultural livelihoods, while comparatively limited empirical evidence addresses technological transformations, AI governance, digital labour, or feminist innovation ecosystems. This imbalance constrains understanding of how emerging global transformations interact with historically rooted gender inequalities across diverse societies.

Theoretical developments have sought to address these shortcomings through increasing integration of intersectionality, decolonial perspectives, and gender-transformative frameworks. Empirical evaluations indicate that studies adopting integrated theoretical approaches explain gender inequalities more comprehensively than those relying upon single theoretical perspectives (Hankivsky et al., 2024). For instance, research examining digital gender-based violence increasingly combines intersectionality with feminist political economy to explain why online harassment disproportionately targets women occupying

visible political, professional, and activist roles. Similarly, studies investigating climate resilience increasingly integrate intersectionality with decolonial frameworks to explain differential adaptive capacities among women based on ethnicity, indigenous status, land ownership, disability, and geographical location (FAO, 2025). These developments demonstrate an important methodological shift from descriptive analyses towards multidimensional explanations of gender inequality.

Despite these advances, important methodological limitations remain evident across the empirical literature. First, most studies continue adopting cross-sectional research designs, limiting understanding of how emerging gender issues evolve. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies capable of capturing dynamic social change remain comparatively scarce, particularly within low and middle-income countries. Second, considerable geographical imbalances persist. Most empirical evidence concerning artificial intelligence, digital governance, algorithmic discrimination, and platform economies originate from Europe, North America, and East Asia, while evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa remains relatively limited despite rapid technological expansion across the continent (World Bank, 2025). Third, disciplinary fragmentation continues to characterize the literature. Researchers frequently examine climate change, digital transformation, unpaid care work, labour markets, gender identity, or governance as isolated phenomena, resulting in fragmented knowledge that inadequately captures the interconnected nature of contemporary gender inequalities (Muhingi, Sikudi, Wahome, Oloo, Ngumi & Sanka, 2025).

Another significant limitation concerns the predominance of vulnerability-oriented narratives. Although empirical studies consistently document women's disproportionate exposure to poverty, climate shocks, digital exclusion, and violence, comparatively fewer investigations examine women's agency, innovation, resilience, leadership, and transformative capacity. Recent evaluations of gender-transformative programmes demonstrate that interventions emphasizing women's leadership, community participation, shared caregiving responsibilities, digital entrepreneurship, and institutional reform produce more sustainable development outcomes than deficit-oriented approaches focusing exclusively on vulnerability (Dworkin et al., 2024). This emerging evidence supports the Gender-Transformative Approach by illustrating that sustainable gender equality requires transforming discriminatory institutions and social norms rather than merely addressing immediate inequalities.

Within the African context, additional empirical gaps remain concerning the interaction of emerging technologies, climate governance, labour-market transformation, and gender policy. Existing studies often

examine these themes independently, providing limited understanding of how digitalization, artificial intelligence, environmental change, and shifting political economies collectively reshape gender relations. Similar limitations characterize Kenyan scholarship, where substantial research exists on gender-based violence, political representation, reproductive health, and education, but comparatively limited evidence synthesizes the combined effects of digital transformation, climate vulnerability, unpaid care work, algorithmic bias, and changing gender identities within a single analytical framework. Furthermore, relatively few Kenyan studies explicitly integrate intersectionality, decolonial feminism, and gender-transformative perspectives, thereby limiting theoretical advancement and policy relevance.

Collectively, the empirical evidence demonstrates broad consensus that gender inequalities have become increasingly multidimensional, extending beyond conventional concerns of education, employment, and political participation to encompass technological governance, environmental justice, epistemic inequalities, digital safety, changing identities, and care economies. However, significant disagreements remain regarding the relative influence of legal reforms, institutional change, cultural transformation, technological innovation, and political economy in addressing these emerging challenges. Moreover, existing scholarship remains fragmented across disciplinary, geographical, and theoretical boundaries, limiting comprehensive understanding of how multiple global transformations simultaneously influence gender relations.

Against this background, the present study makes four important contributions to the literature. First, it advances an integrated empirical synthesis that brings together previously fragmented evidence on digital transformation, artificial intelligence, digital gender-based violence, climate change, unpaid care work, labour-market restructuring, gender identities, and knowledge production within a single analytical framework. Second, by integrating Liberal Feminist Theory, Intersectionality Theory, Decolonial Feminist Theory, and the Gender-Transformative Approach, the study moves beyond single-theory explanations to provide a multidimensional understanding of emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world. Third, it strengthens the representation of Global South perspectives through comparative synthesis of global, African, and Kenyan evidence, thereby addressing persistent epistemic imbalances within contemporary gender scholarship. Finally, the study generates evidence-informed policy recommendations that support more integrated, context-sensitive, and transformative approaches capable of accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 13 (Climate Action), and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). By doing so, it responds directly to calls

from recent systematic reviews for interdisciplinary scholarship that captures the complexity of gender in an era defined by rapid technological, environmental, economic, and socio-political transformation.

3. Methodology

This study employed a rapid literature review using a qualitative evidence synthesis approach to critically interrogate emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world. Unlike a traditional narrative review, the rapid review followed a structured and transparent process of identifying, screening, analysing, and synthesising contemporary scholarly and policy literature while maintaining methodological rigour. The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Page et al. 2021) principles to enhance transparency in study selection.

Relevant literature published mainly between 2020 and 2026 was retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, and Wiley Online Library. In addition, grey literature from UN Women, the World Economic Forum, UNESCO, ILO, OECD, the World Bank, FAO, UNDP, and the African Union was also reviewed.

Studies were purposively selected based on relevance, methodological quality, recency, and empirical contribution. Following screening, evidence was subjected to thematic content analysis and critical synthesis. Rather than summarising individual studies, findings were comparatively analysed across global, regional (Sub-Saharan Africa), and Kenyan contexts. The interpretation was informed by Liberal Feminist Theory, Intersectionality Theory, Decolonial Feminist Theory, and the Gender-Transformative Approach, enabling a multidimensional understanding of emerging gender issues and their implications for policy and practice. Specifically, the review primarily included empirical studies, systematic reviews, policy reports, and other relevant scholarly literature published between 2020 and 2026, in order to capture recent and emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world. However, seminal theoretical works published before 2020 were retained where they provided the foundational conceptual basis for the theoretical framework underpinning the study. These included foundational contributions to Liberal Feminist Theory, Intersectionality Theory, and Decolonial Feminist Theory.

4. Results and Discussion

The review demonstrates that emerging gender issues have evolved beyond traditional concerns of education, employment, and political participation to encompass complex interactions among technological innovation,

climate change, labour-market transformation, changing gender identities, and knowledge production. Across the reviewed studies, four major themes emerged.

First, digital transformation has produced both opportunities and new forms of inequality. Globally, digital technologies have expanded women's access to education, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and political participation. However, comparative evidence consistently shows that digitalization has simultaneously widened gender disparities through unequal digital access, algorithmic bias, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). Women remain underrepresented in STEM and artificial intelligence professions, accounting for only about 28% of the global STEM workforce, while AI systems continue to reproduce historical gender biases embedded within training datasets (UNESCO, 2025). Studies from Kenya further demonstrate increasing digital political violence against women through cyberbullying, doxing, deepfakes, and coordinated online harassment, undermining democratic participation.

Second, the findings indicate that climate change disproportionately affects women because of pre-existing structural inequalities rather than biological differences. Comparative evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa shows that women experience greater vulnerability to drought, food insecurity, displacement, and unpaid caregiving responsibilities owing to unequal access to land, finance, education, and decision-making. Nevertheless, the review identifies an important shift within recent scholarship from portraying women solely as climate victims towards recognising their leadership in community adaptation, environmental governance, and resilience-building initiatives.

Third, persistent inequalities within labour markets and the care economy continue to constrain gender equality despite policy progress. Women continue to perform more than 76% of global unpaid care work, contributing an estimated US\$10.8 trillion annually in unrecognised economic value. Countries with universal childcare systems, paid parental leave, and gender-responsive labour policies consistently demonstrate higher female labour-force participation and narrower wage gaps than countries lacking comprehensive care policies. The evidence therefore suggests that unpaid care work remains one of the most significant structural barriers to women's economic empowerment.

Fourth, the review highlights significant shifts in gender identities, intersectionality, and the geopolitics of knowledge production. Increasing recognition of diverse gender identities has expanded contemporary gender discourse beyond binary understandings of sex and gender. Simultaneously, scholars increasingly criticise the dominance of Global North perspectives in gender scholarship, arguing that locally grounded knowledge and indigenous experiences remain underrepresented in

global research and policymaking. Emerging evidence therefore supports greater epistemic justice and context-specific gender frameworks.

Across all themes, the review reveals considerable convergence regarding the persistence of structural gender inequalities despite significant legal and policy advances. However, important contradictions remain concerning the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming, digital governance, and universal policy approaches. Existing studies frequently examine digitalisation, climate change, labour markets, and gender identity separately, resulting in a fragmented understanding of their cumulative impacts.

The findings demonstrate that contemporary gender inequalities are increasingly intersectional, multidimensional, and systemic, requiring integrated policy responses that simultaneously address technological governance, climate resilience, care economies, institutional reform, and epistemic inclusion. These findings validate the integrated theoretical framework adopted in this study and reinforce the need for gender-transformative policies capable of responding to rapidly evolving global social, technological, and environmental change.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study critically examined emerging gender issues in a rapidly changing world by synthesising contemporary evidence on digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), climate change, unpaid care work, labour market transformation, changing gender identities, and the politics of knowledge production. The review demonstrates that while global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have contributed to progress in gender equality, technological, environmental, economic, and socio-political transformations continue to generate new and complex forms of inequality. Emerging challenges, including algorithmic bias, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, climate-induced vulnerabilities, unequal care responsibilities, and epistemic injustice, reveal that gender inequalities are increasingly multidimensional and interconnected.

The study further shows that conventional policy approaches focusing solely on legal equality are insufficient for addressing these evolving challenges. Instead, integrating Liberal Feminist Theory, Intersectionality Theory, Decolonial Feminist Theory, and the Gender-Transformative Approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how structural, institutional, cultural, and technological factors interact to shape gender outcomes. By synthesising fragmented evidence across global, African, and Kenyan contexts,

this study contributes to the literature through an integrated analytical framework that advances understanding of emerging gender issues while informing evidence-based policy and practice. Achieving sustainable gender equality will therefore require coordinated, intersectional, context-sensitive, and transformative interventions capable of responding to an increasingly dynamic global environment.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Governments should mainstream intersectionality into national development policies to address the overlapping effects of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and geographical location on inequality.
2. Governments and technology companies should develop regulatory frameworks that address algorithmic bias, promote ethical AI, and strengthen legal protections against technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
3. Climate adaptation and mitigation strategies should prioritise women's leadership, improve equitable access to climate finance, land, technology, and strengthen resilience among vulnerable communities.
4. Governments should invest in childcare, eldercare, parental leave, and family-friendly workplace policies while incorporating unpaid care work into national economic accounting systems.
5. Universities, research institutions, and funding agencies should strengthen support for Global South scholarship, interdisciplinary research, and locally grounded evidence to promote epistemic justice.
6. Researchers should undertake longitudinal and comparative studies examining the interactions among digital transformation, AI, climate change, labour markets, and gender while improving gender-disaggregated and intersectional data systems to support evidence-based policymaking and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

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