



# **AI for Economic Opportunity: Black Workers and Learners**



May 2025

# About this study

## Context of the Study:

- This study reveals how AI can serve as a critical lever for economic success, provided that access and opportunity are prioritized for people who face barriers to economic advancement.

## Sample Overview:

- Sample Size: 2,754 respondents across demographic groups.
- Booster samples employed to over-represent populations.
- Boosted representation of Black African American (529), Hispanic (540), and people with records of arrest, conviction, or incarceration (*people with records*) (349).
- Gender representation: 1,069 males, 1,666 females.
- Final data weighted back to statistically reflect the U.S. population, aged 16 and above, in accordance with latest U.S. census data.
- The survey was conducted between November 20 - 27, 2024.

## Methodology

- Mixed methods approach: quantitative survey complemented by qualitative questions.
- Key topics: AI awareness, skill development, career impact, and barriers to adoption.

## Analysis

- Comparisons have been drawn in the data between Black learners and workers, one of JFF's focus populations, and the total survey sample, described above.

Survey fielded by  
**AudienceNet**





# 01

## **Executive Summary**

# Executive Summary



*Higher than average levels of AI familiarity, optimism, use, interest, impact and influence among Black workers and learners*

- Among Black workers and learners there is *higher than average familiarity with AI*—with a high depth of understanding among males and younger Black workers and learners, aged 16-34.
- Optimism about the impact of AI in education is high, with again, this notably peaking among *male Black workers and learners*.
- Two out of every three Black workers and learners feel that AI is currently having an impact on their job—an elevated percentage when compared to the overall population sample—with *four out of every five anticipating a future impact on their job*.
- This is a group of people among whom there is a majority feeling that AI does *more good than harm*, both at a local community level and more broadly across society.
- There is a higher-than-average propensity for this group to seek AI information from *social media*. Note also more than half of Black workers and learners *utilizing AI very regularly*—with a notably higher frequency than across the population sample as a whole.
- This may be linked to *almost twice as many as average paying for AI tools* and a higher percentage *having access to employer or school provided paid AI tools and/or training*.
- AI also appears to be utilized for *a wider range of reasons* than average—often led by curiosity and potential benefit.
- This group also demonstrates significantly higher desire than average to *increase their familiarity and use of AI* AND they feel *more prepared* to successfully use it in their job—often having already felt the impact of AI in their workplace.
- The impact of AI in promoting job success on Black workers and learners is also more evident than it is felt by the population sample overall, with 68% reporting that it has *significantly changed the importance of skills*, compared to 58% overall.
- AI training is also viewed as more *effective*; almost twice as many Black workers and learners than in the population sample as a whole have used AI tools to *secure a better job*; and more have encountered AI in the *job application process*.
- 45% of Black workers and learners *have changed or planned to change their career as a result of the impact of AI*—a figure significantly higher than average (31%). Over 70% feel the need to *gain new skills* due to the impact of AI on their work.



# 02

## **Awareness & Understanding of AI**

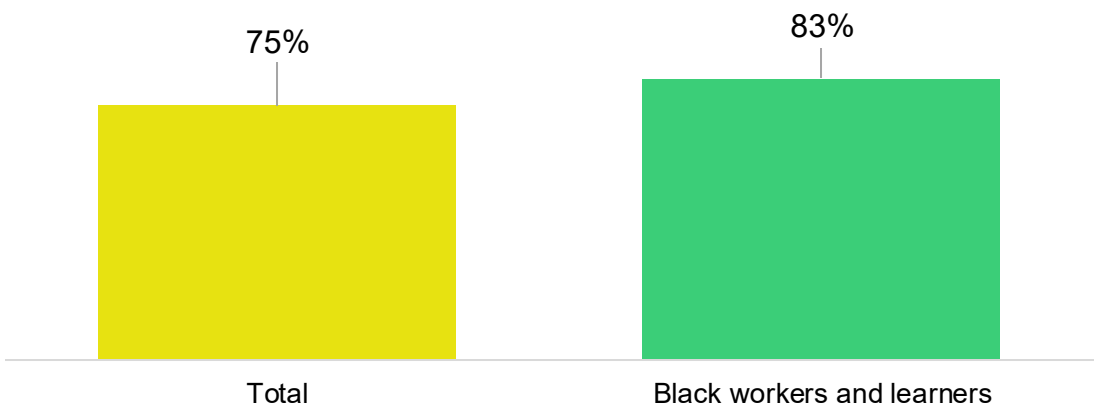
# Awareness/familiarity with AI among Black workers and learners



*Higher than average awareness and understanding*

## UNPROMPTED AWARENESS

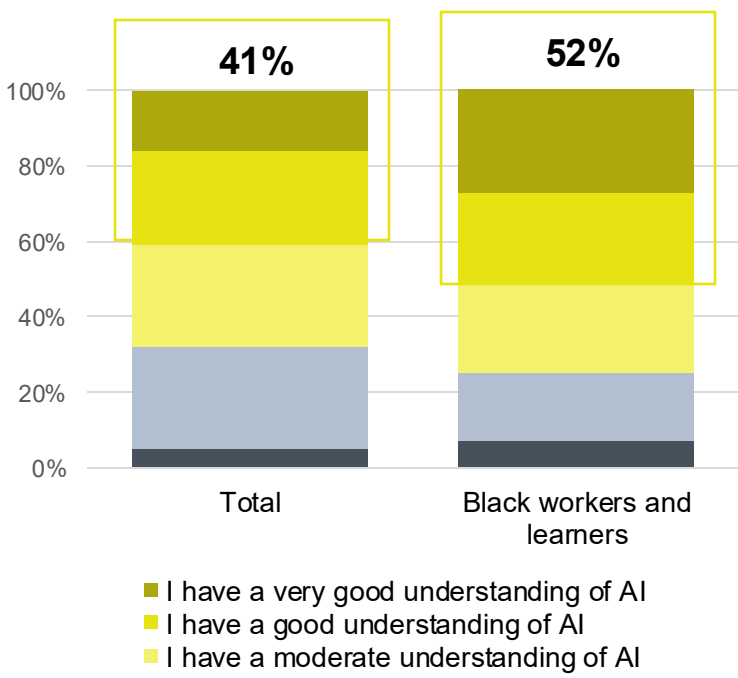
Over 80% of Black workers and learners were familiar with AI. This represents the highest level of AI familiarity across the four ‘interest groups’ and is notably higher than across the population sample as a whole (75%).



*Familiarity was higher among males (85%) than among females (80%) and among the youngest Black workers and learners aged 16-34 (85-88%).*

## PROMPTED UNDERSTANDING

After reading a description, more than half of Black workers and learners reported having a good understanding of AI, notably higher than among the overall population sample (41%).



This level of understanding was again higher among males, and among younger Black workers and learners, aged 16-34.

Q: How familiar are you with the term 'Artificial Intelligence' (AI)? / Having read this text, how would you rate your current level of understanding of 'AI'?



# Perceptions of AI – qualitative responses

01

## Productivity and assistance

AI was seen to simplify tasks, enhance efficiency, and support work across various fields.

*“AI helps with daily tasks, making life easier and faster.”*

*“A tool to perform all types of things that are not performed by humans.”*

02

## Learning and adaptation

AI is seen as technology that learns, adapts, and improves over time.

*“It’s a program that learns as it goes.”*

*“Self-learning software that adapts to its environment.”*

03

## Simulation of human intelligence

AI was seen to mimic human thought processes, problem-solving, and decision-making.

*“AI is a system that thinks like a human but faster.”*

*“Artificial intelligence mimics human behavior.”*

04

## Mixed feelings

Respondents expressed optimism about AI’s potential but also fear and skepticism.

*“AI is a powerful tool for the future of civilization.”*

*“It’s scary because it could replace humans entirely.”*

05

## Reflection of data and society

AI is viewed as a system that aggregates and mirrors human knowledge.

*“AI is an aggregate of everything humans have done.”*

*“It gathers data and creates something meaningful.”*



# 03

## Perceptions of AI



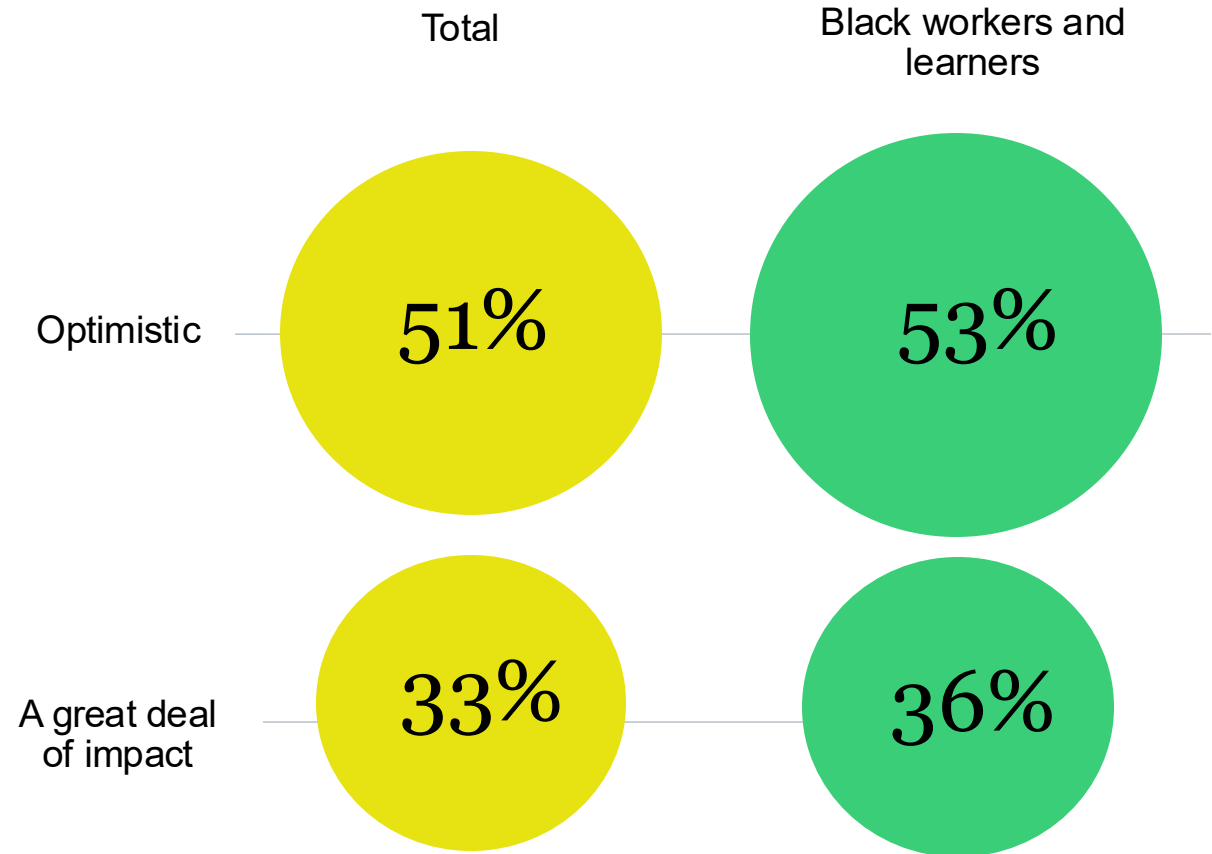
# Optimism and current impact of AI in education

*Slightly higher levels of optimism about AI impact were seen among Black workers and learners*

*Black workers and learners were slightly more optimistic about the future impact of AI on education (53%) than the sample population as a whole (51%).*

*They were also more likely than average to feel that AI was significantly impacting their own education or training (36% feeling this compared to 33% overall).*

*Females noted the greatest impact (41%), along with the youngest Black workers and learners, aged 16-24 (50%).*

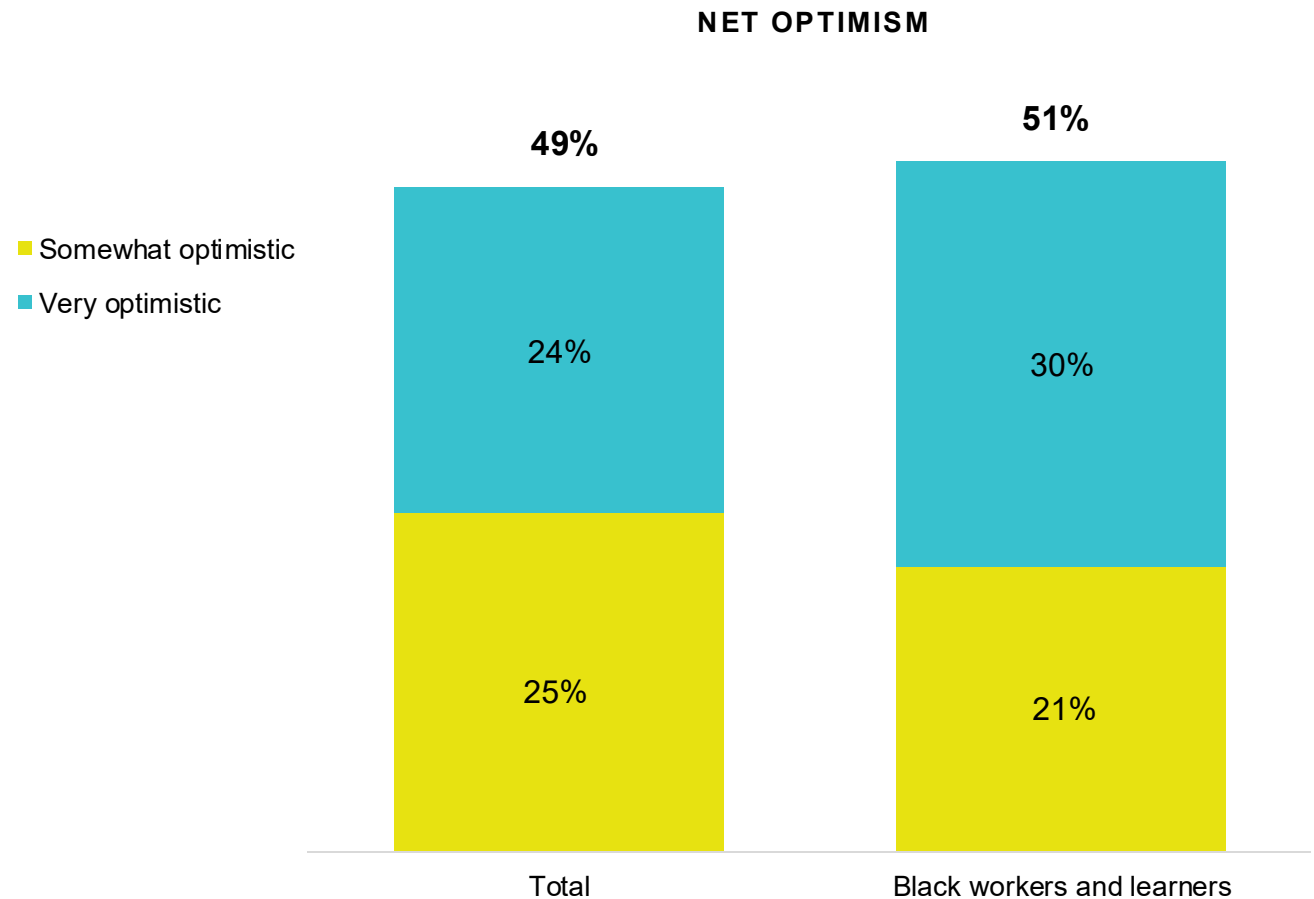


# AI's future impact on workers generally: male Black workers and learners far more optimistic than females

*A slightly higher level of optimism was seen among Black workers and learners*

Among those currently in or seeking education or training, slightly more Black workers and learners (51%) felt optimistic about the future impact of AI on workers generally, with 21% claiming to be “very optimistic.”

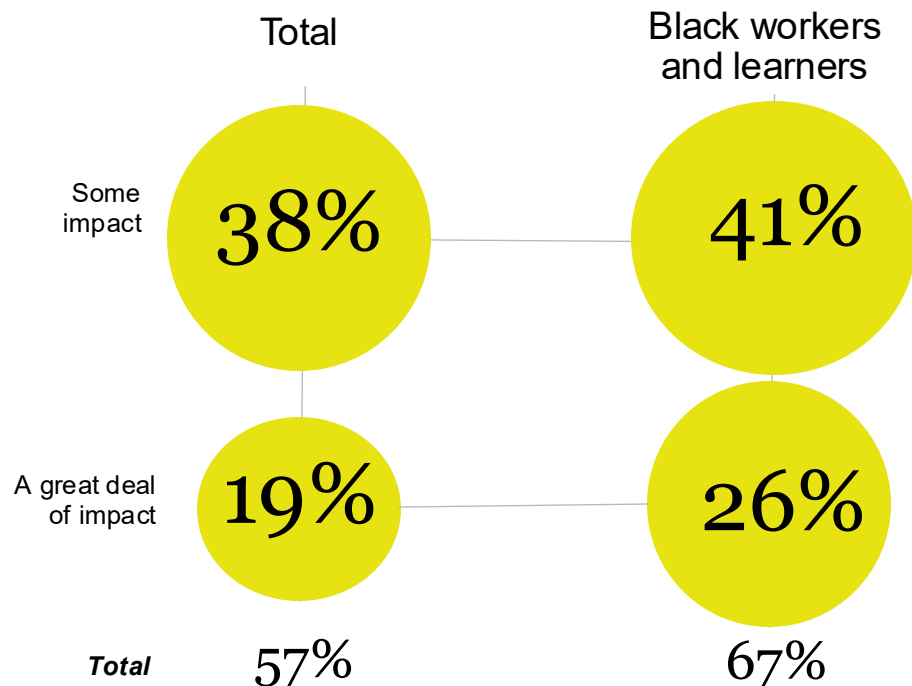
Male Black workers and learners were significantly more optimistic, with 64% indicating so, compared to 35% of female respondents. This gap is particularly pronounced in the “very optimistic” category: 41% of male Black workers and learners described themselves as “very optimistic,” more than twice the proportion of females (17%).



# Perceptions of the impact of AI in jobs

## CURRENT IMPACT

Over two-thirds of Black workers and learners (67%) felt that AI tools were having “some impact” (41%) or “a great deal of impact” (26%) on their jobs. This impact is clearly higher than that experienced by the overall population sample.



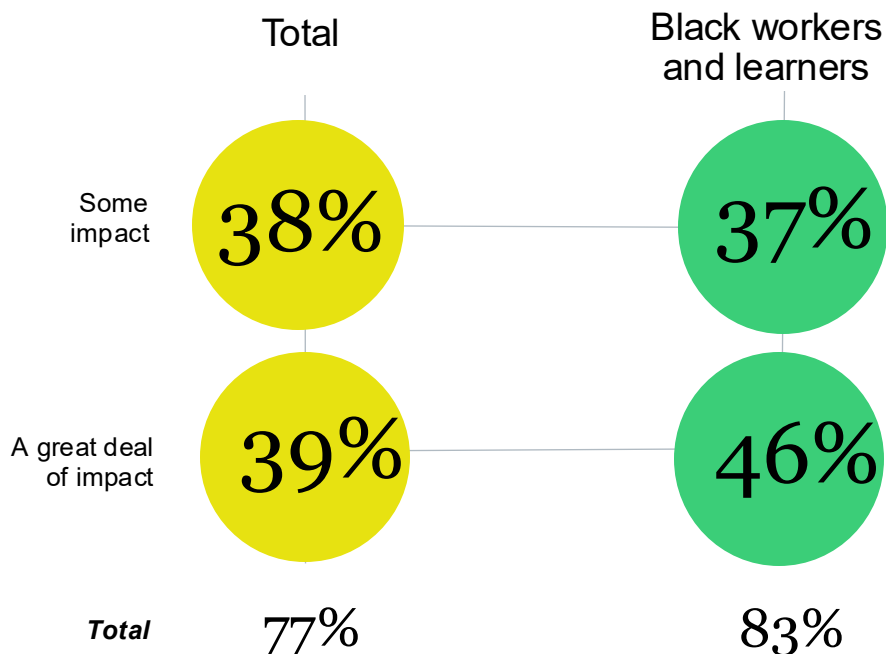
## FUTURE IMPACT



claimed that AI tools will have an impact on the job or career they expect to have in the next 3-5 years.



claimed that such tools will have a great deal of impact.



Q: How much impact do you think AI tools are currently having on your job? / How much impact do you think AI tools will have on the job or career you expect to have in the next 3-5 years?



# AI and society: definite positive local and societal impact



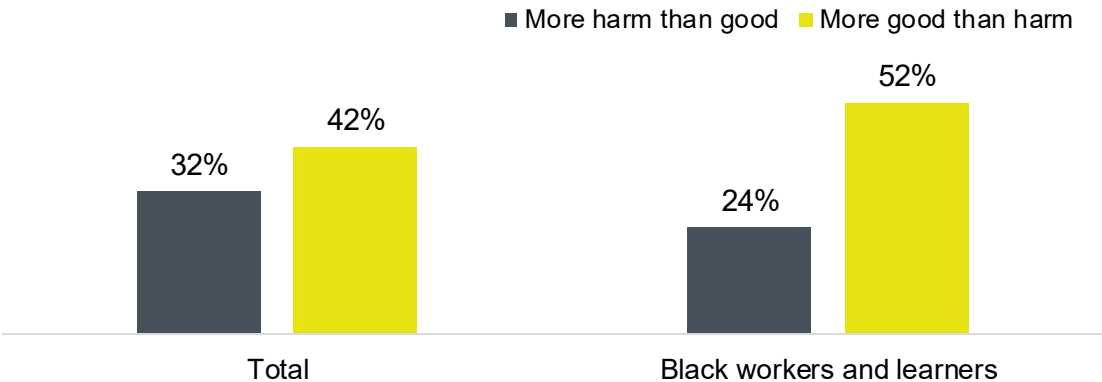
*We asked respondents to evaluate whether AI is doing “more harm than good,” or “more good than harm,” regarding people’s ability to find jobs, build wealth, and secure their quality of life, both in their local community and in society as a whole.*

Among Black workers and learners, more than twice as many feel that AI is doing more good at a community level (52%) than harm (24%).

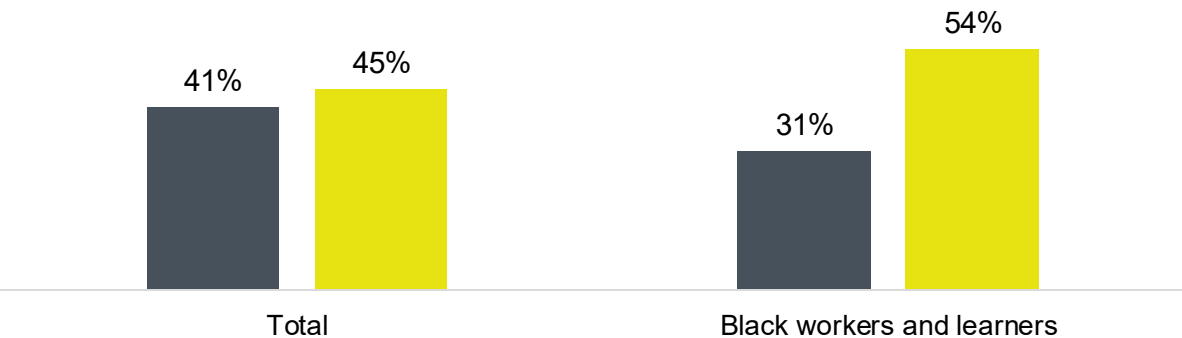
Similarly positive perceptions are evident in relation to societal impact, with 54% viewing it as doing more good and just 31% regarding it as doing more harm.

Again, male Black workers and learners are more positive about the impact of AI on both community and societal levels than their female counterparts.

## LOCAL COMMUNITY LEVEL



## SOCIETY AS A WHOLE



Q. When you think about the impact of AI, do you believe it is having more harm than good, or more good than harm on people’s ability to find jobs, build wealth, and secure their quality of life, in: a) your community and b) society as a whole?



# 04

## **AI Tools: Knowledge & Skills**

# AI awareness and learning: social media dominates among Black workers and learners

*Black workers and learners are more likely than the general population to use and find social media useful for AI information and training.*

WHERE PEOPLE HEAR ABOUT AI

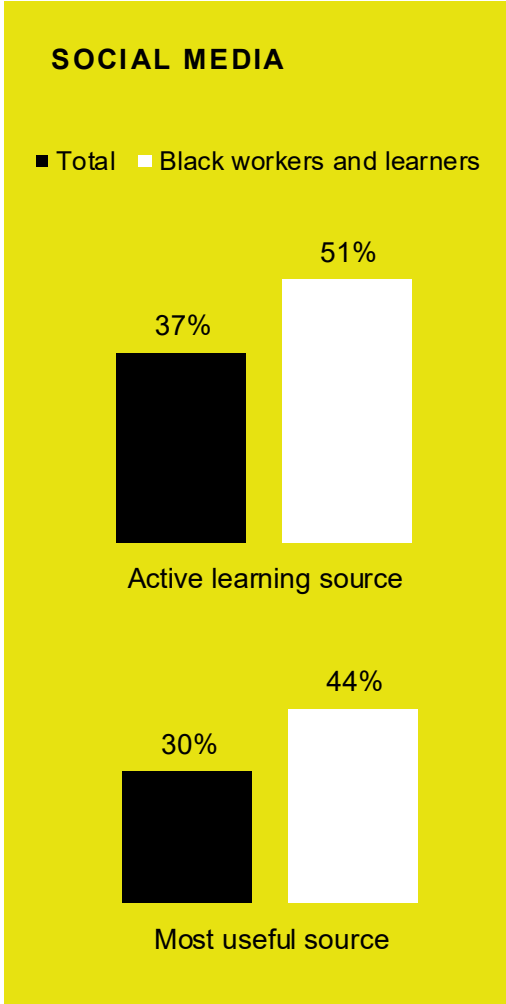
Social media	73%
News websites and articles	53%
Popular culture	43%
Friends or family	41%
Your employer	15%
Conferences or workshops	9%

ACTIVE LEARNING SOURCES

Social media	51%
News websites and articles	36%
Friends or family	22%
Online courses	16%
Formal education	13%
Your employer	9%
Conferences or workshops	9%

MOST USEFUL SOURCES

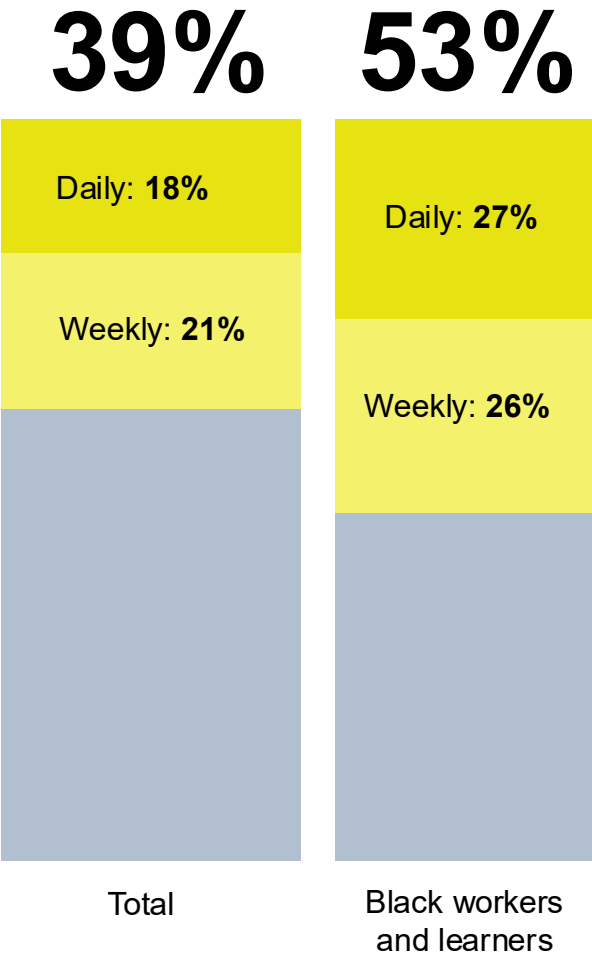
Social media	44%
News websites and articles	27%
Friends or family	5%
Online courses	5%
Popular culture	4%
Conferences or workshops	3%



Q: Where have you heard about AI? / Where have you sought out information or training about AI? / There is a lot of information about AI currently in circulation. Which source of information do you consider to be the most useful?



# AI usage: more frequent use among Black workers and learners, across every usage type



*More than half (53%) of Black workers and learners reported using AI tools either on a daily or weekly basis—notably higher than across the overall population sample (39%).*

Daily and weekly usage was higher among male Black workers and learners (58%) than female (47%), with frequency of usage diminishing among those aged 55+.

Higher than average percentages of Black workers and learners were evident across each and every category of AI usage.

USE OF AI	Total	Black workers and learners
To learn on my own	60%	68%
For my job, on my own initiative	21%	28%
For my education or training program, on my own initiative	19%	23%
For my job, at my employer's direction or with my employer's support	11%	17%
To find a job or a career direction	11%	17%
For my education or training program, with my teacher or instructor's direction	8%	10%
To start or grow a business	8%	15%

Q: How often do you use AI tools? / How do you use AI?

# Using a variety of sources for knowledge on AI, though ChatGPT currently dominates use

It is worth noting that some respondents mentioned not knowing where to turn for information on AI, or that they hadn't attempted to learn more.

Amongst those with more knowledge, most mentions of sources cycled through the following:

- Social media, including mentions of watching videos on the topic on YouTube, reading discussions about AI on X
- News articles and articles of various sorts
- Some mentioned learning from other family members, especially if younger and 'tapped in' to AI
- Some mentioned their employers introducing AI processes to them
- Others said they typed questions about AI into Google and other search engines
- Some mentioned learning through AI tools themselves such as ChatGPT

## The most common AI platforms mentioned qualitatively were:

- *Chat GPT*
- *Google Gemini*
- *Microsoft Copilot*
- *Meta AI*
- *Grammarly*
- Each of these was reportedly used for formulating emails, whether in professional or personal contexts, such as to colleagues, clients, or customer queries.
- A large portion of use went towards searching information such as general queries, within which health related questions were mentioned quite commonly.
- Other uses mentioned were for writing business ads, resumes and job applications.

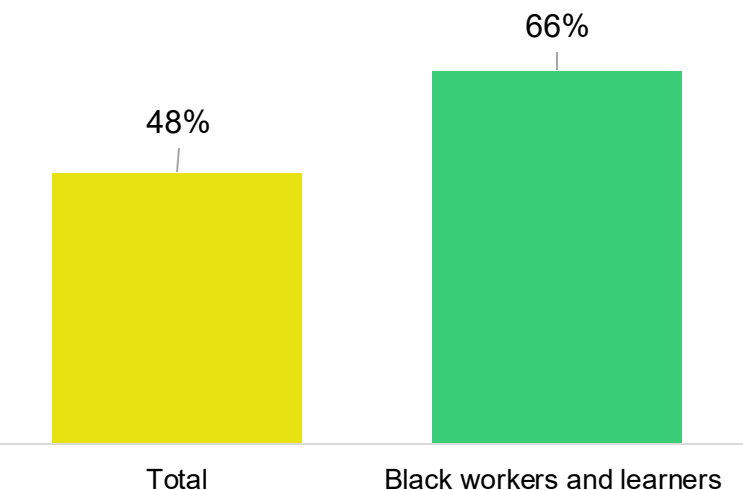
# Higher interest in AI learning among Black workers and learners, driven by both curiosity and personal benefit



*When asked about increasing familiarity with AI tools, 66% of Black workers and learners expressed interest*

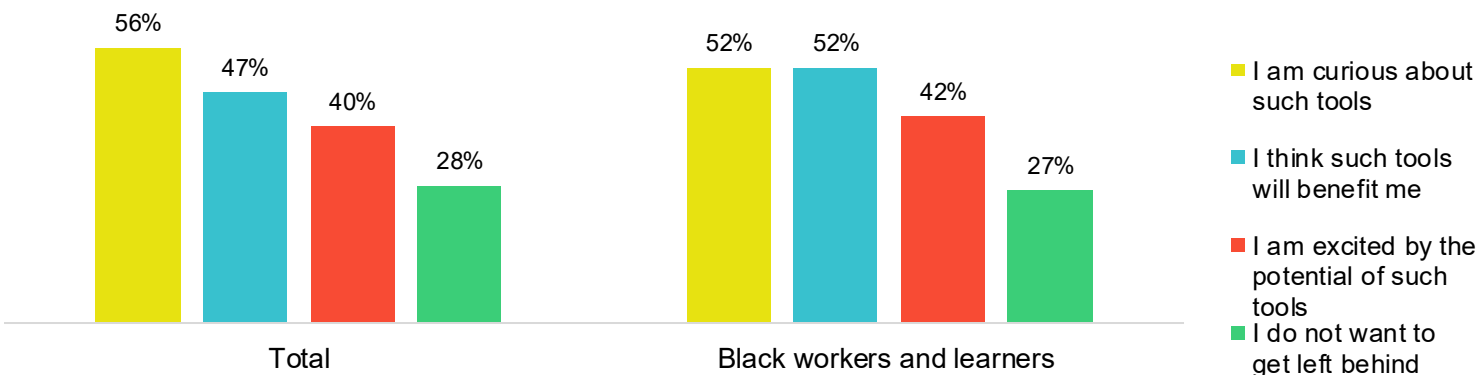
Black workers and learners demonstrated significantly higher interest in increasing their familiarity with AI.

Males were notably more likely than females to express interest (75% vs. 56%).



## DRIVERS TO LEARN MORE

Driving this interest for 52% of Black workers and learners was both curiosity with tools and potential personal benefits.



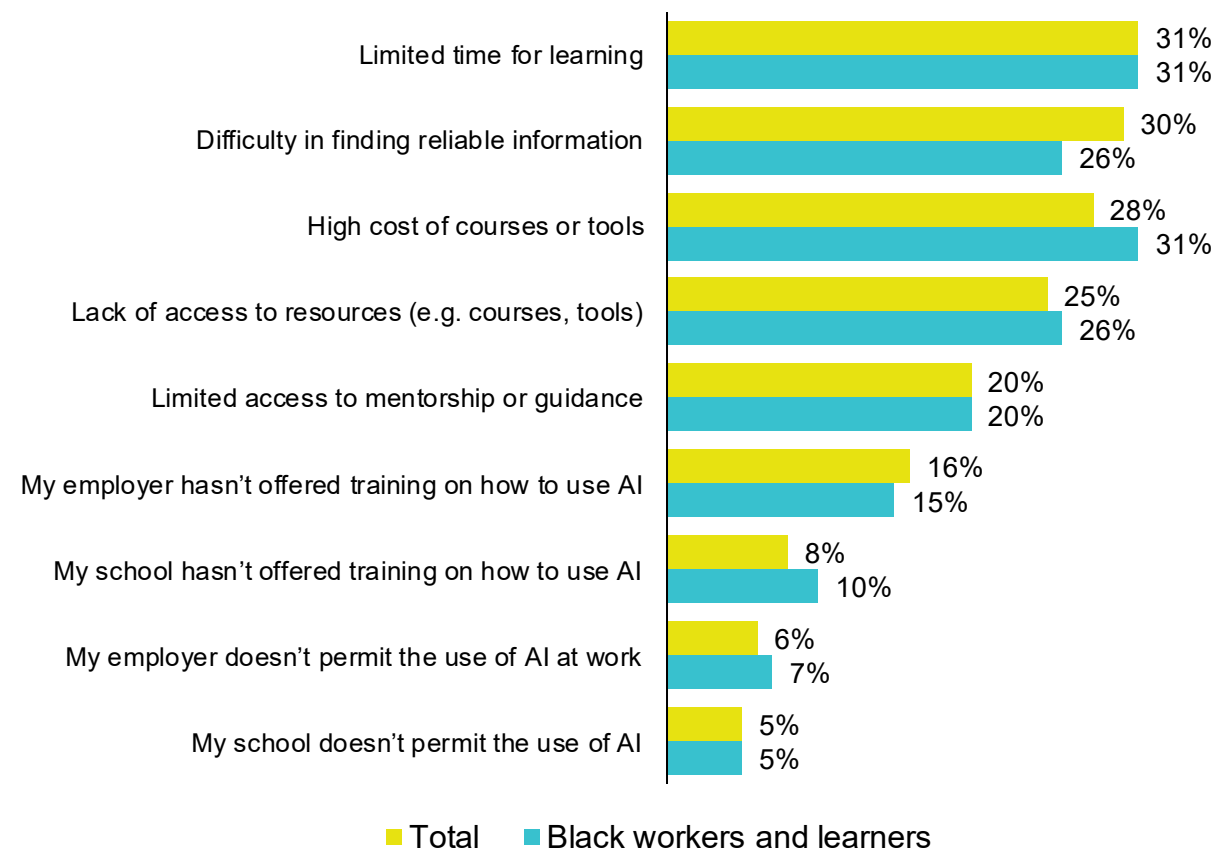
*The drivers for AI exploration by Black workers and learners generally parallel those of the overall population sample, though with a greater focus on personal benefit.*



# However, in contradiction, a perceived lack of personal benefit deters some Black workers and learners from learning more about AI



## BIGGEST BARRIERS FOR THOSE WISHING TO LEARN MORE



## DETERRENTS FOR THOSE NOT WISHING TO LEARN MORE

The key barrier to AI adoption among Black workers and learners, substantially higher than all other reasons, is a feeling that it lacks personal benefit (40%).

	Total	Black workers and learners
I do not think AI tools will benefit me, or it is worth my time/energy	46%	40%
I am concerned about privacy and sharing my personal data with AI tools	45%	24%
I do not agree with the motivations behind the development and deployment of AI tools	35%	21%
I am concerned about potential bias or discrimination	25%	17%
I am concerned that AI use could be viewed as cheating	22%	20%
I am concerned with the energy and climate impacts of AI	17%	21%

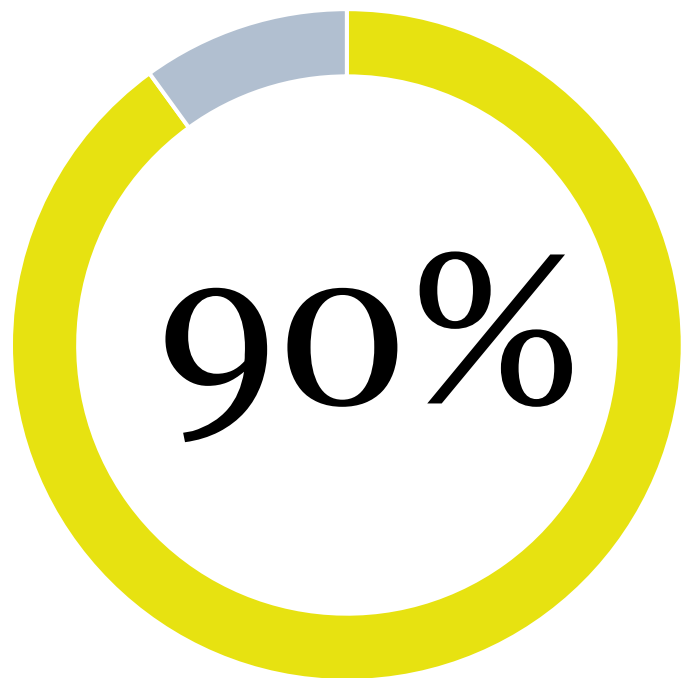
Q: What are the biggest barriers to increasing your familiarity and use of AI tools for work or learning? / Why do you not want to increase your familiarity and use of AI tools?



# 05

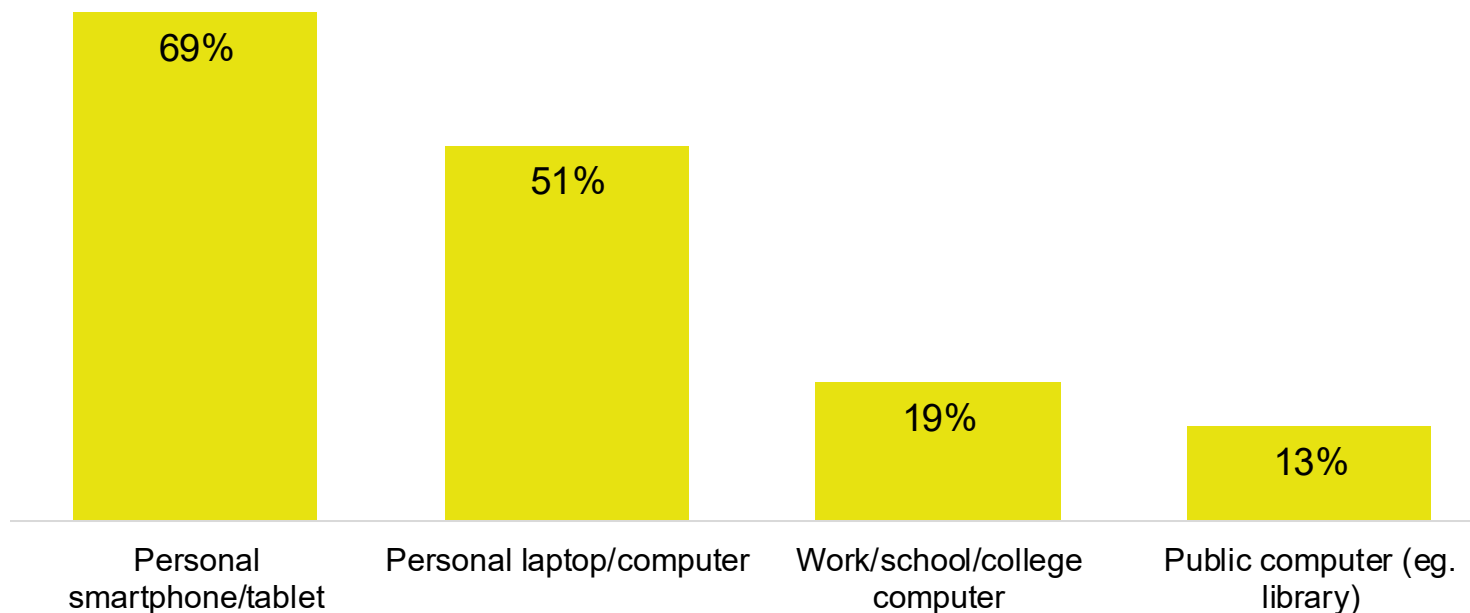
## **Access to AI Tools**

# Access to AI tools—smartphones and tablets dominate among Black workers and learners



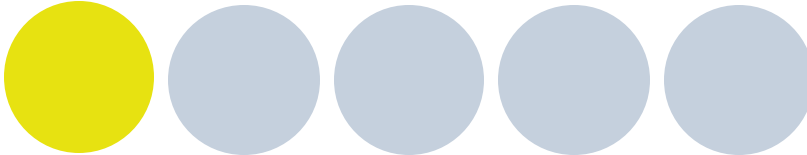
of Black workers and learners had access to broadband internet at home—identical to the population sample as a whole. Males (93%) are more likely than females (87%) to have broadband internet access.

Black workers and learners most commonly reported accessing AI tools via a personal smartphone or tablet. This is higher than the overall population sample. Personal laptop/computers access at 51% is slightly higher than among the overall population sample (48%). Among older Black workers and learners (aged 65+), both types of access are significantly reduced.

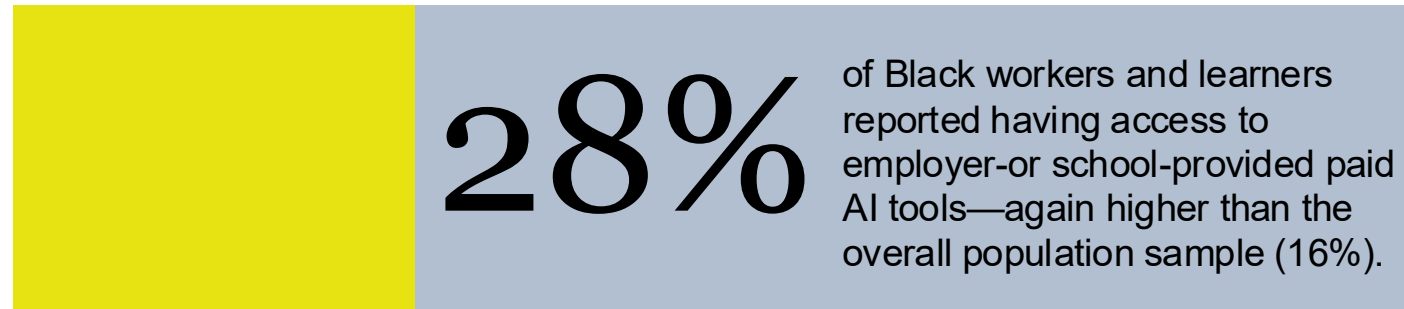


# Higher than average personal spending on AI and access to work/school paid tools among Black workers and learners

18%



Almost one in five of Black workers and learners were personally paying for AI tools.  
This is a figure notably higher than that of the population sample as a whole (10%).







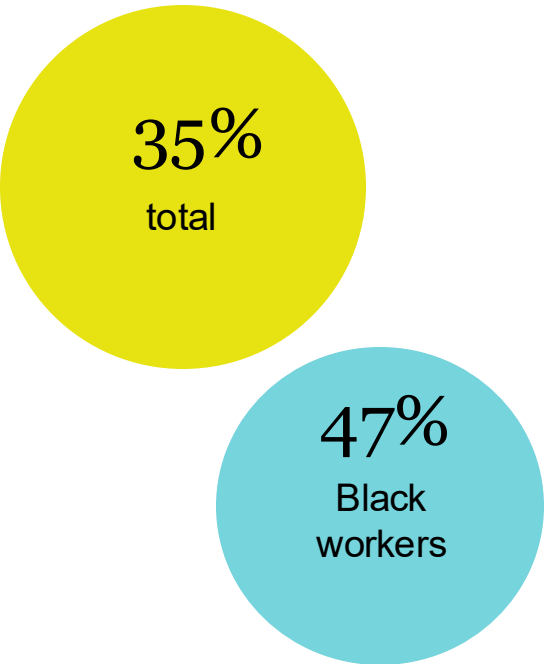
# 06

## AI & Work

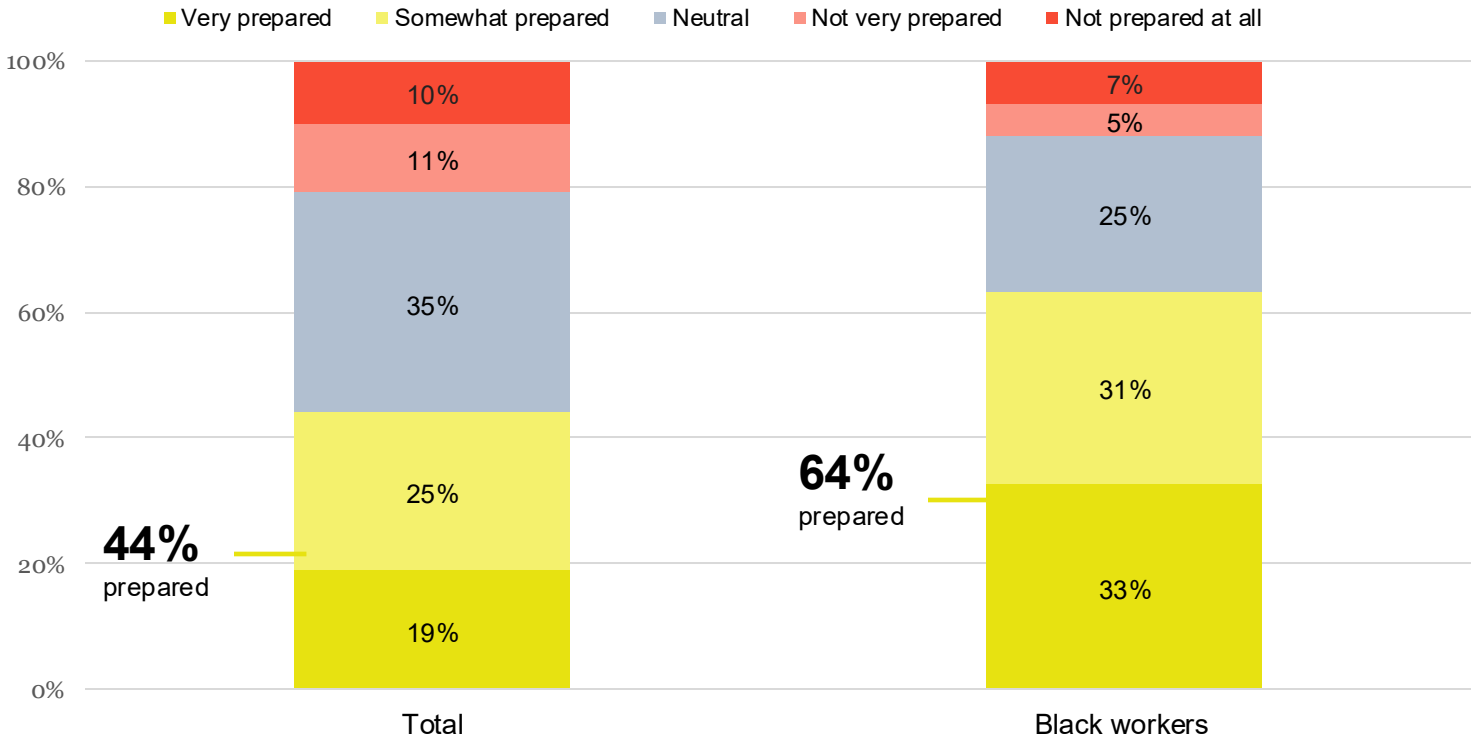
# AI in the workplace: higher use and a much more evident feeling of preparedness among Black workers



A higher-than-average percentage of Black workers reported using AI tools in their work (47%).



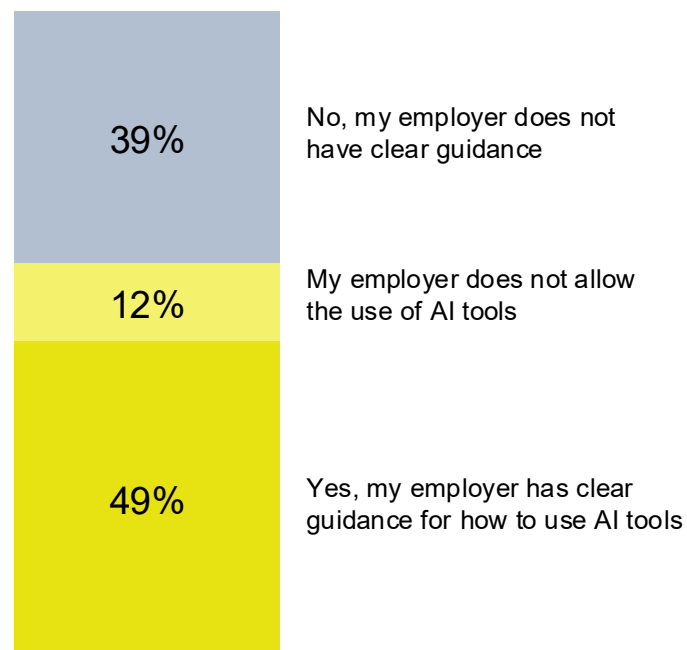
Black workers feel significantly more prepared to use AI successfully in their job—with 64% feeling this way, compared to 44% across the overall population sample.



Q: To the best of your knowledge, are you currently using any AI tools to do your work? / How prepared do you feel to use AI successfully in your job?

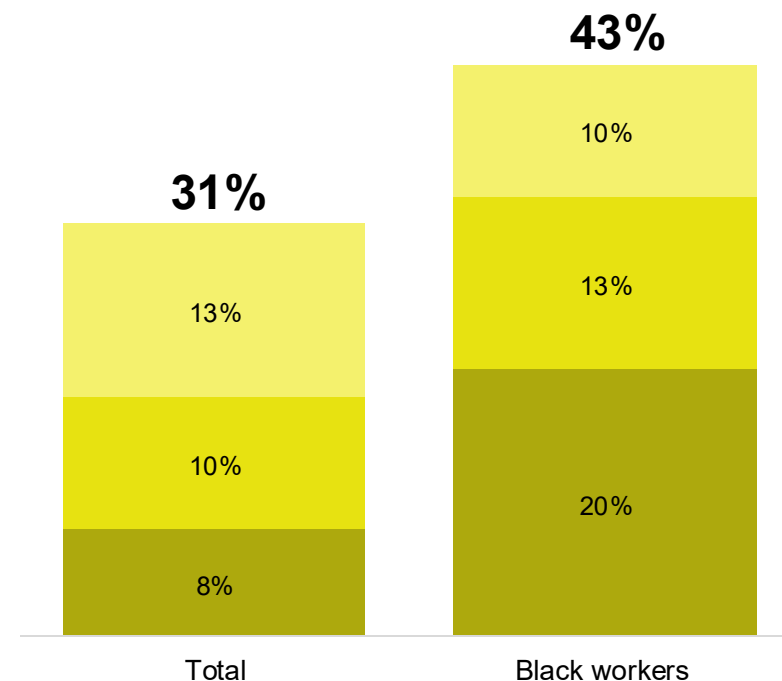
# Bridging the AI training gap: more employers provide clear guidance or AI training to Black workers

Among Black workers, almost half (49%) reported that their employer provides clear guidance on the use of AI tools—a figure much higher than the 35% reported across the overall population sample.



- 43% of Black workers reported that their employer offers training on general AI fundamentals, or how to use specific AI tools and systems or both. Again, this compares positively with 31% across the overall population sample.
- Over a third (34%) of currently employed individuals, who were not receiving AI training at work, expressed a desire for employer-provided AI training.
- This desire was higher among males (37%) than females (28%).

- Yes, my employer offers training on both general AI fundamentals and specific AI tools and systems
- Yes, my employer offers training on how to use AI tools and systems
- Yes, my employer offers training on general AI fundamentals

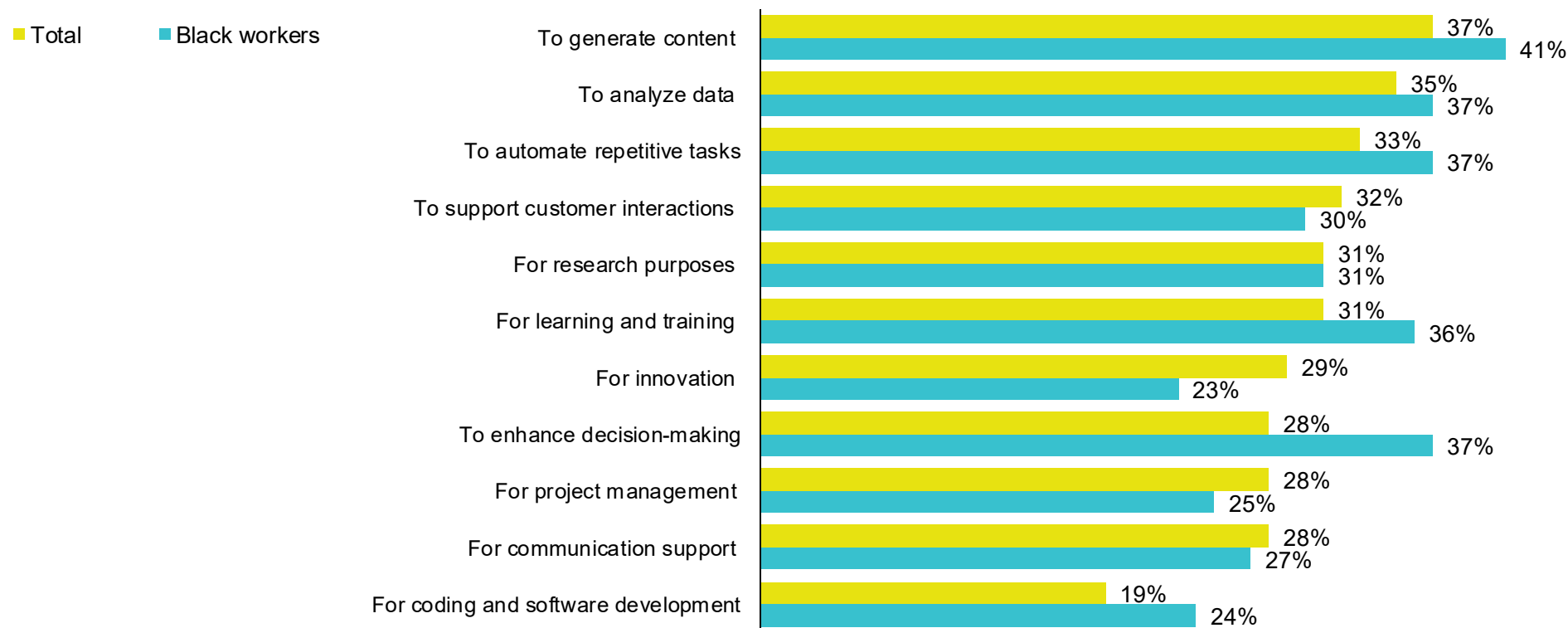


# AI tools power multiple key work tasks for Black workers



*Black workers are most likely to be using the power of AI to aid content creation, analyze data, automate repetitive tasks, enhance decision-making and for learning and training generally.*

## USES OF AI: OVERALL POPULATION SAMPLE AND BLACK WORKERS



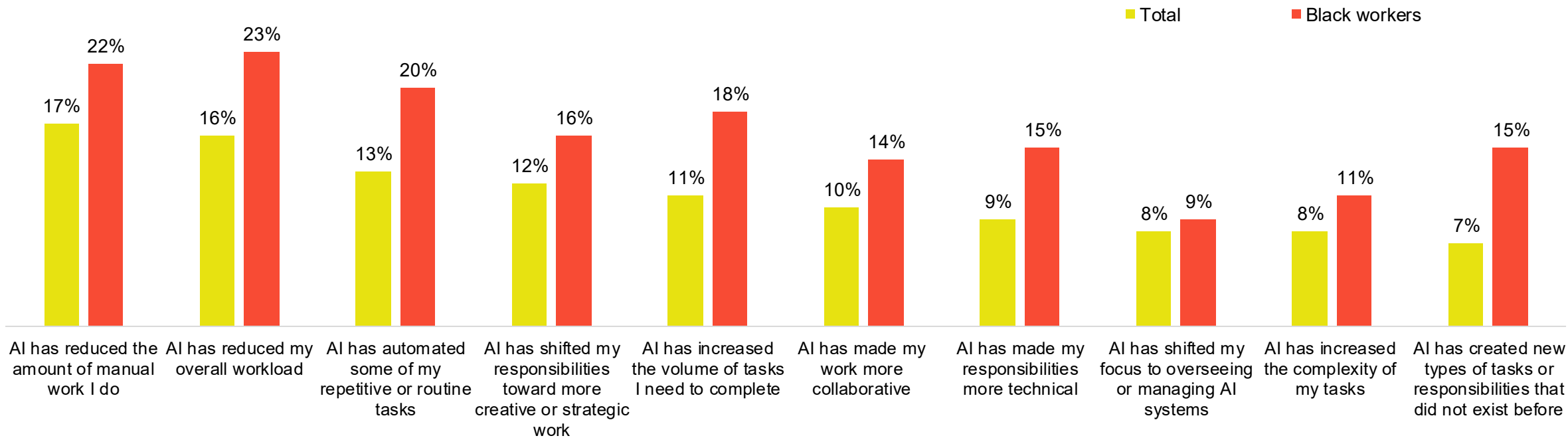
Q: How are you currently using AI tools to complete your work and job responsibilities?

# Black workers report a greater AI impact on job responsibilities than on average



While just over a third (36%) of Black workers reported that AI has not impacted their responsibilities, a higher-than-average proportion (64% vs. 52% overall) highlighted specific effects.

The most typical effects for this group focused on a reduction in manual/overall workload and an automation of repetitive or routine tasks.



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Q: In what way, if at all, have AI tools impacted your responsibilities at work?

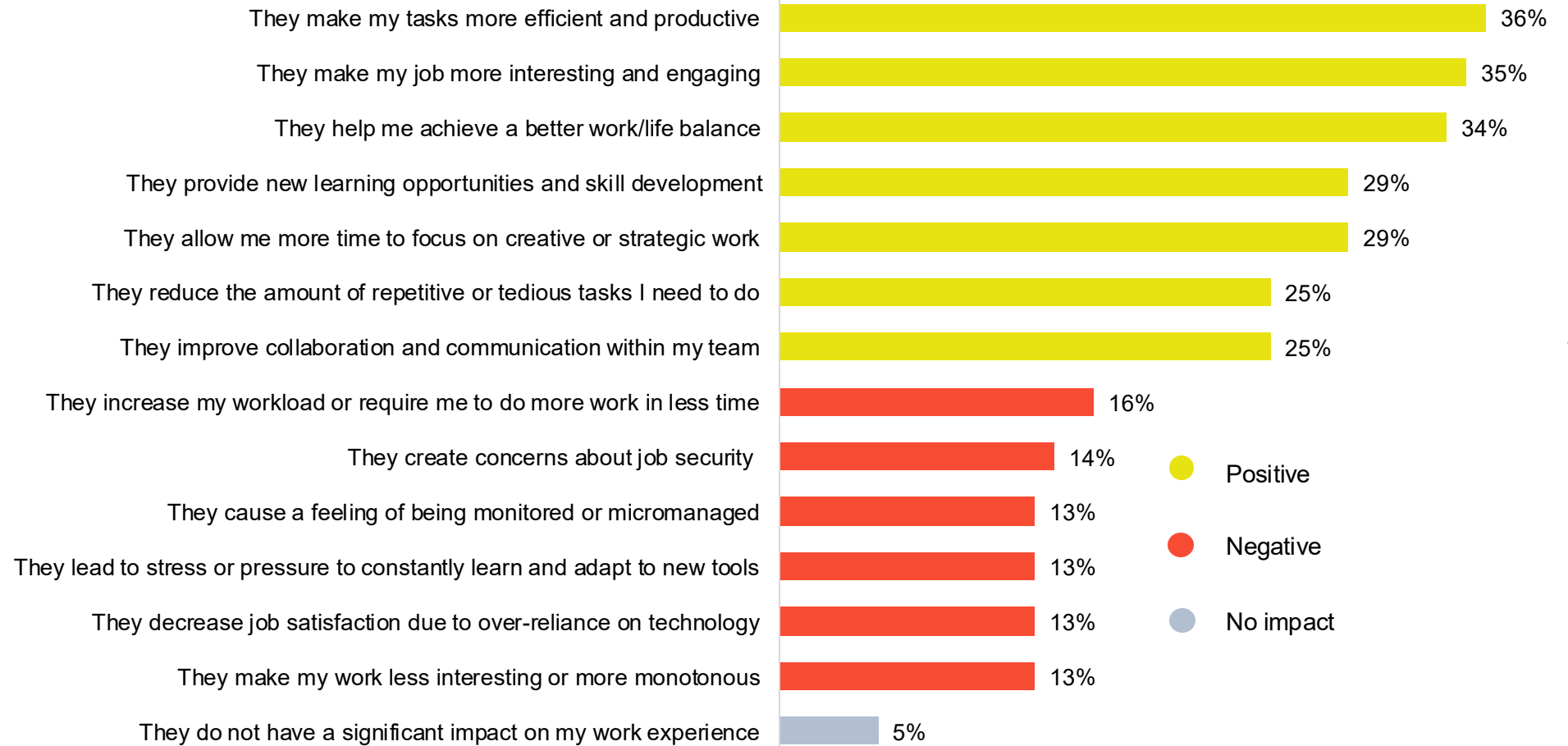


# For Black workers, the benefits of AI tools outweigh the negative—with a focus on increased efficiency, productivity, interest, engagement, and improved work/life balance

Black workers are often likely to report that AI tools make tasks more efficient and productive (36%). This aligns with the overall population sample.

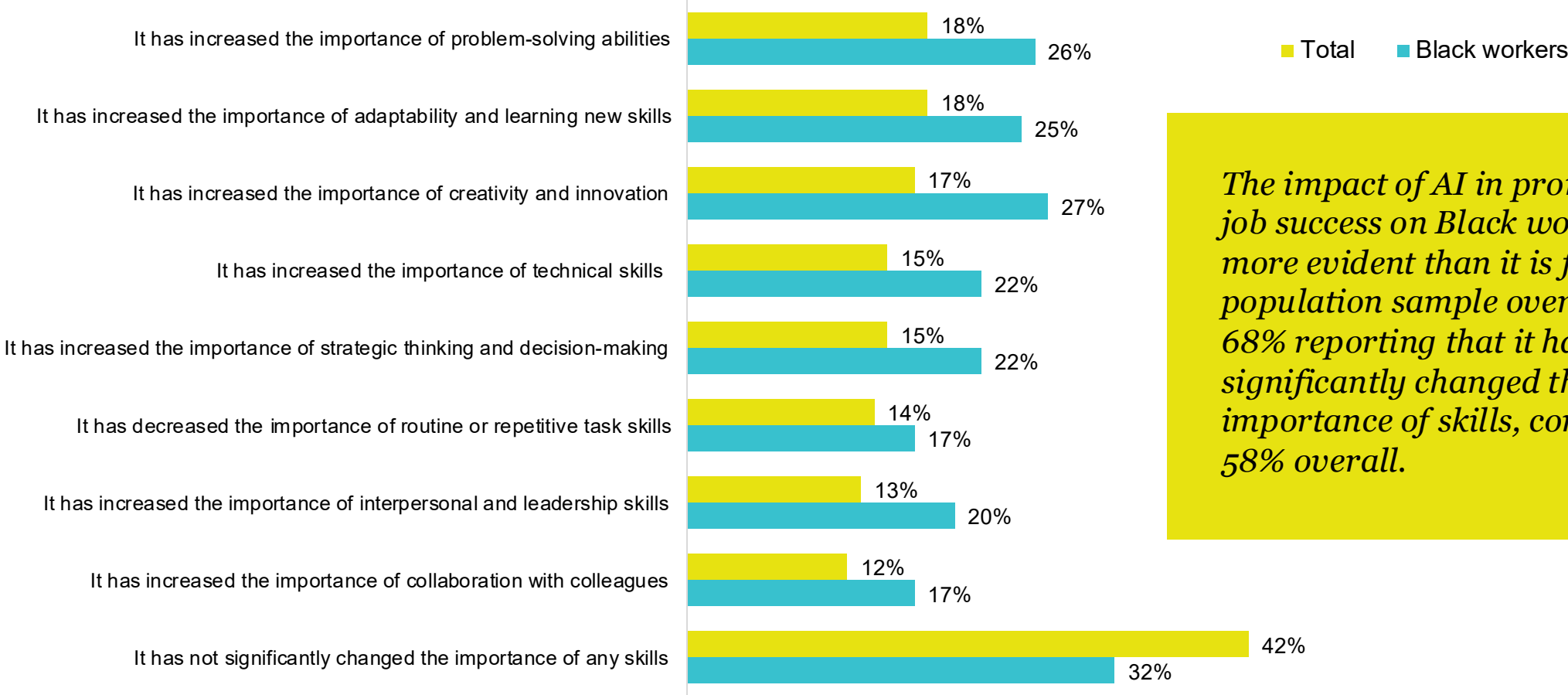
AI also makes jobs more interesting and engaging for Black workers (35%) and helps achieve a better work/life balance (34%).

Other benefits highlight new learning opportunities, enabling time to focus on creative or strategic work, reducing repetition of work, and improved collaboration and communication.



Q: In what way, if at all, are AI tools impacting your experience of work?

# AI is particularly reshaping skill priorities, elevating problem-solving, adaptability and creativity/innovation for Black workers.



*The impact of AI in promoting job success on Black workers is more evident than it is felt by the population sample overall—with 68% reporting that it has significantly changed the importance of skills, compared to 58% overall.*

Q: How do you feel AI is impacting the skills you need to be successful in your job?



# 07

## AI & Education

# AI adoption soaring in education: with higher than average frequent usage by Black learners

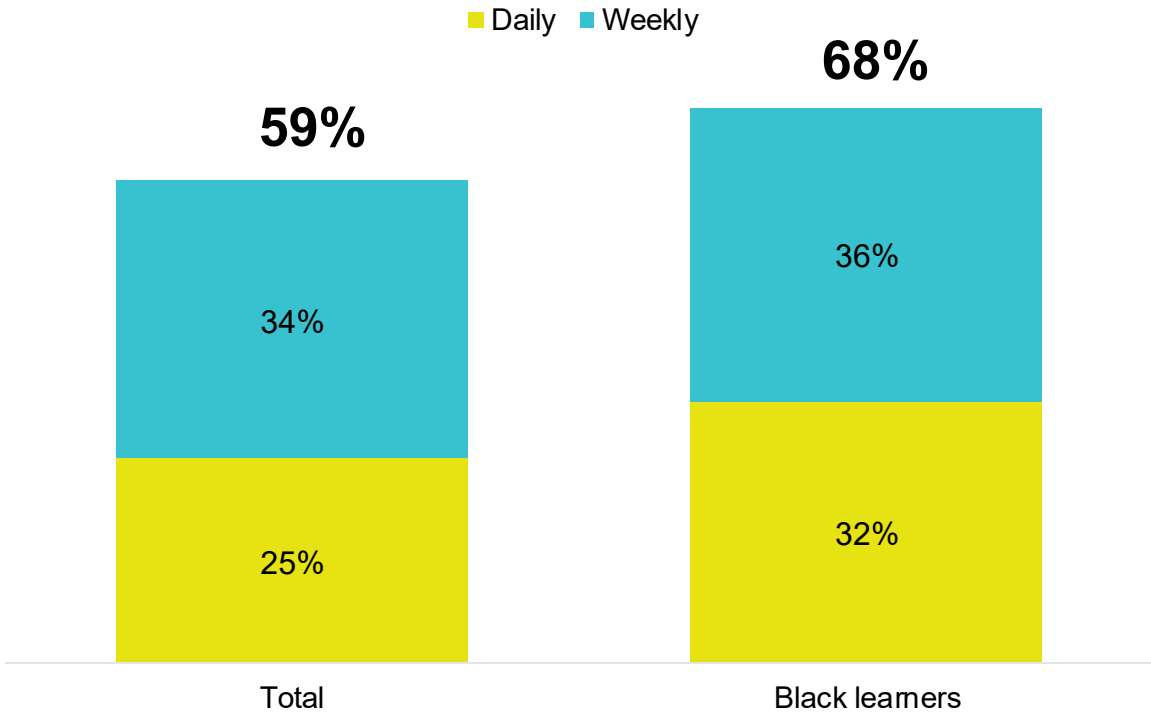


**Among Black learners who are in education or looking to continue their studies**, the uses of AI were varied. 50% use or intend to use AI for writing assistance, such as grammar and style checking. Just 10% indicated they do not use or plan to use AI in their education or training. These uses generally align with those of the overall population sample.

TOP USES

01	Writing assistance	50%
02	Creative tasks	45%
03	Research	41%
04	Study aids	39%
05	Career guidance	27%
06	Data analysis	25%

68% of Black learners use AI weekly or daily compared to 59% of the overall population sample.



Q: How, if at all, are you currently using, or intending to use, AI tools in your education or training? / How often do you currently use AI tools in your education or training?

# AI boosts assignment completion efficiency, together with a number of other uses by Black learners



## DRIVERS

Among Black learners who use AI tools at least monthly in their education or training, the reasons were varied, but they focused on completing assignments with greater efficiency and improving research and data analysis capabilities.

To complete assignments or projects more efficiently	43%
To improve research and data analysis capabilities	43%
To enhance learning and understanding of complex subjects	39%
To explore additional learning resources and study materials	37%
To receive personalized feedback or recommendations for improvement	36%
To prepare for exams or assessments	36%
To gain access to AI-driven tutoring or assistance	23%

## BARRIERS

A particular preference for more traditional learning methods (46%), alongside trust issues (39%) and privacy or data security concerns (35%), emerged as the most frequent barriers preventing Black learners from utilizing AI more frequently.

Q: What are the main reasons you use AI tools frequently in your education or training? Please select all that apply. / What are the main reasons you are not frequently using AI tools in your education or training? Please select all that apply.



# AI in education: balancing integration, relationships, and collaboration

## AI INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION

70%

of Black students report AI tools being incorporated into lessons/training.

28%

seeing frequent use and 42% occasional integration by teachers/instructors.

15%

want AI integration, but aren't experiencing it. However, note that another 15% prefer no AI integration.

## IMPACT ON STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

30%

feel more supported in their learning through AI-assisted resources.

However, while some feel that their connectivity (30%) and communication with teachers has improved (23%), others (19%) feel that it has become less effective, with a greater sense of isolation.

20%

indicate that AI tools have had no significant impact on their relationship with their teachers/instructors.

## IMPACT ON PEER RELATIONSHIPS

25%

reported improved collaboration through AI-facilitated group projects, compared to a higher 27% who claimed to find collaboration less frequent.

21%

report feeling more connected to their peers, higher than the 14% who feel less connected.

20%

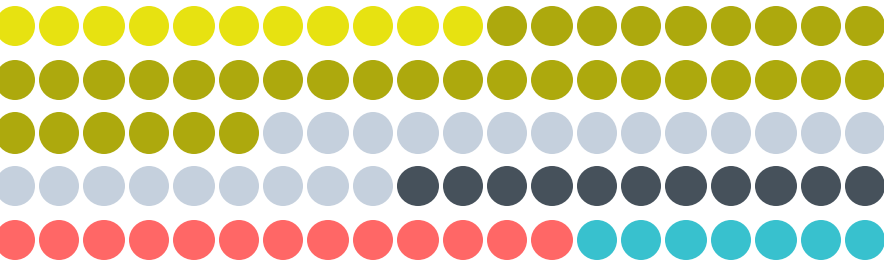
feel that AI tools have made learning more competitive amongst their peers.

*19% of Black learners feel more isolated and less connected with their teachers due to AI. Opinions on the impact on connectivity and communication between peers are split.*

# Very mixed AI policies in education but more experiences of effective training for Black learners



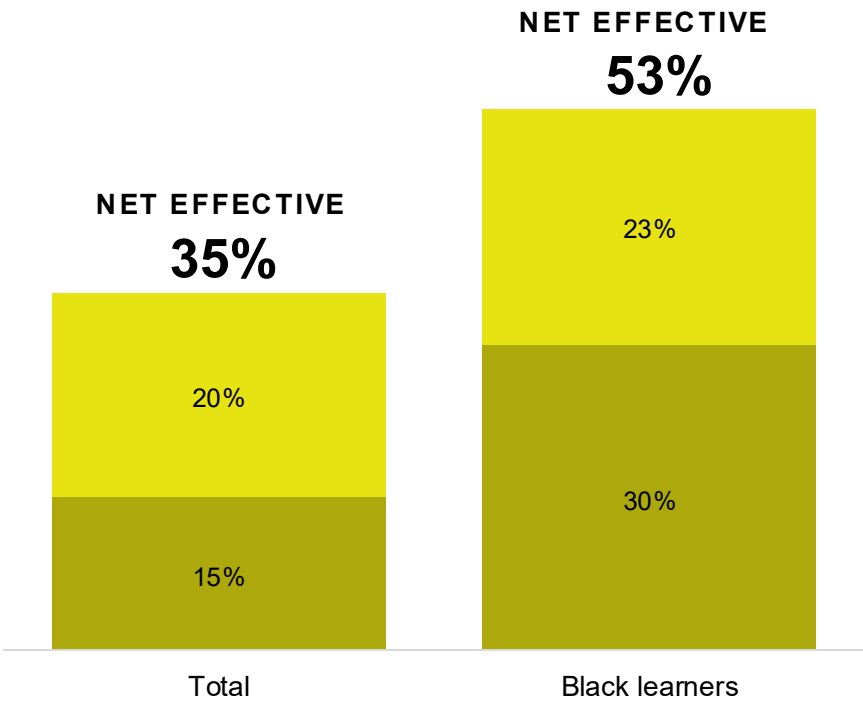
Just 11% of Black learners report full permission and encouragement—largely aligned to the overall population sample (10%). Restricted use is the most common approach reported by 35%, while 23% note AI is only allowed for non-assessment purposes.



Fully permitted and encouraged	11%
Allowed with some restrictions	35%
Allowed only for non-assessment purposes	23%
Prohibited in all exams, assessments, and assignments	11%
I'm not sure what the policy is	13%
Does not apply to me	7%

30% of Black learners found AI training highly effective—substantially higher than that reported in the overall population sample.

- Yes, and the training was somewhat effective
- Yes, and the training was highly effective

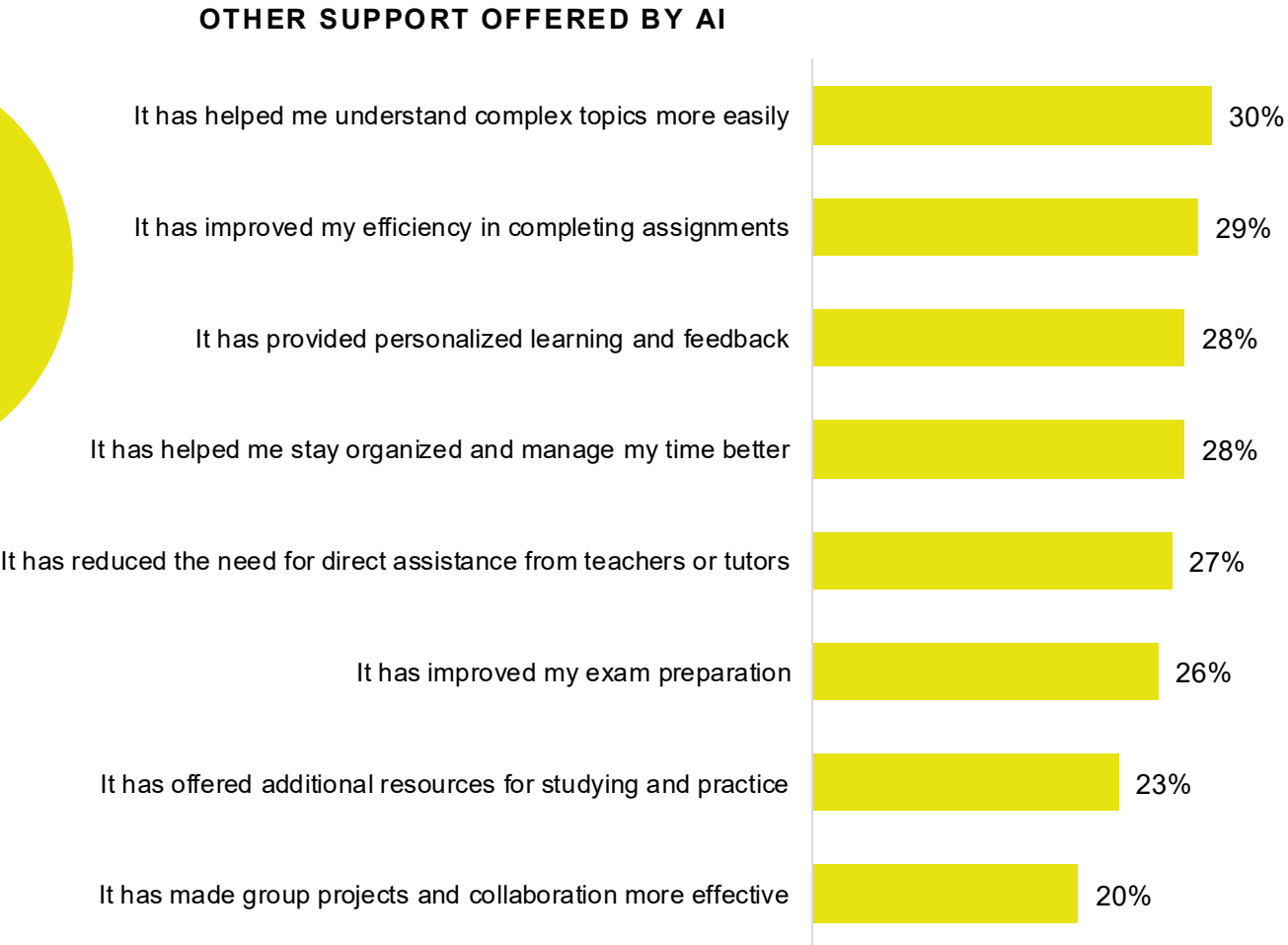
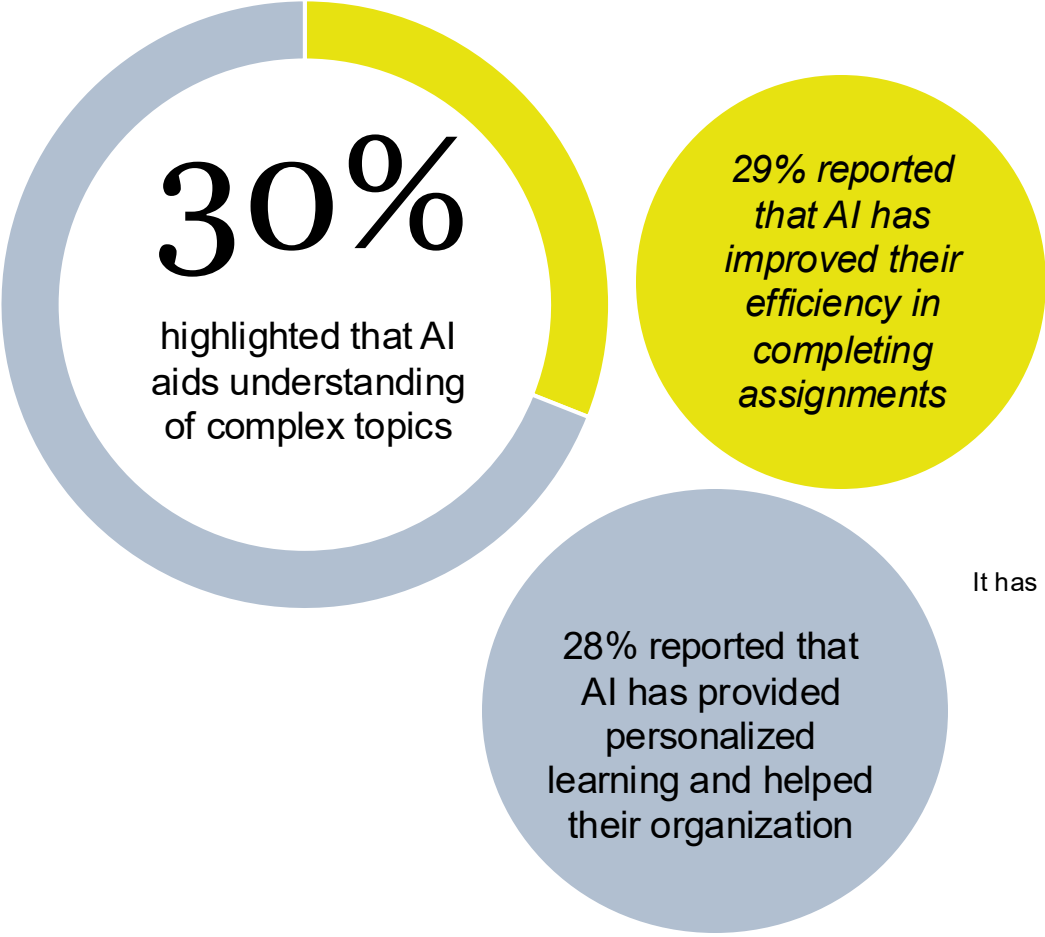


22%  
of Black learners  
reported receiving  
no training

However, this is far  
lower than evident  
overall (38%).

Q.: What is your school's or educational institution's policy on the use of AI tools in exams, assessments, and assignments? / Have you received any training on how to use AI tools in your education from your education or training provider? If so, how effective was it

# AI tools shaping educational experiences for Black learners



Q: How has AI supported you in your education or training programs? Please select all that apply.

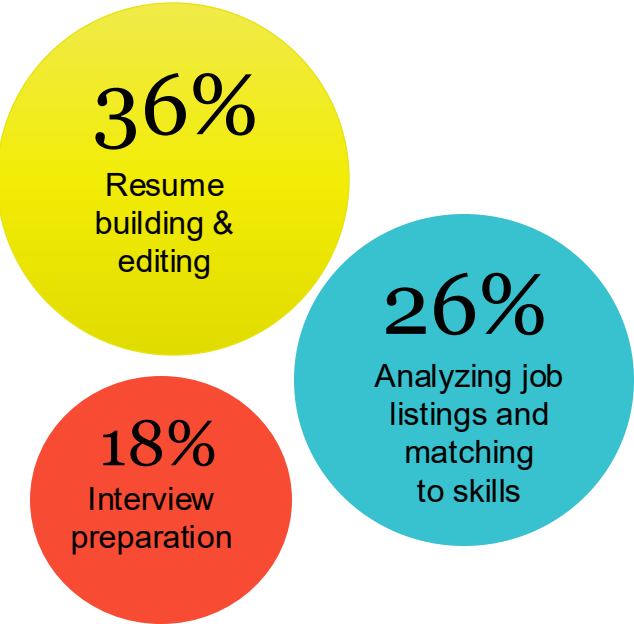


# 08

## **Impact on Career Pathways**

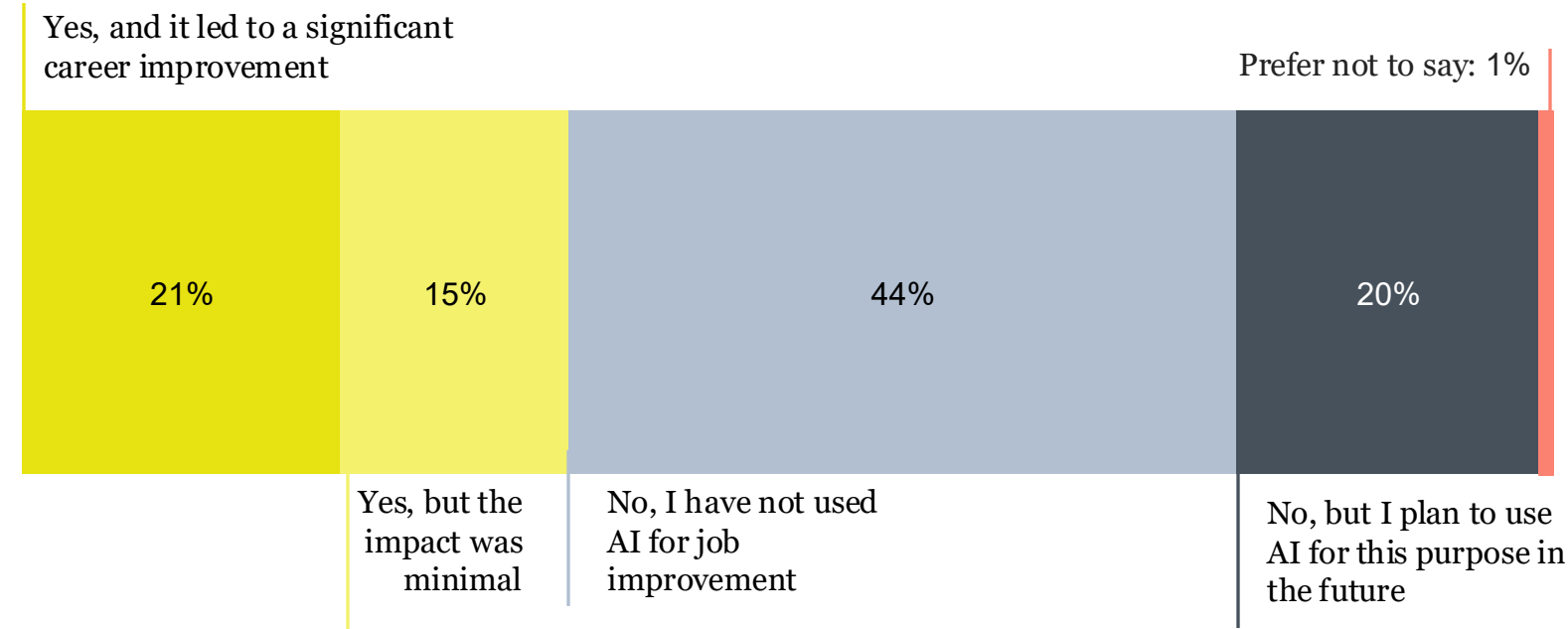
# AI as a tool for economic mobility: opportunities yet to be fully realized for Black workers and learners

*AI tools support Black job seekers in resume building and skill matching largely aligned to population sample overall*



36% of Black respondents had used AI tools to get a better job, almost twice as high as across the population sample as a whole. 21% reported significant career improvements, while a further 15% reported minimal impact. These figures are significantly higher than those of the overall population sample.

One in five respondents (20%) plan to explore AI for job improvements/career growth in the future, with this interest being slightly higher than the overall population sample.



Q: How, if at all, are you currently using AI tools in your search for work/more work? / Have you used AI to get a better job (e.g. with higher wage, higher career potential)?



# AI is becoming a key support in the job application process

Almost  
**1 in 3**

Notably higher than the overall population sample of 20%, 30% of Black workers and learners reported encountering AI tools during a job application process, including interviews.

- Many spoke about using AI to help create resumes, both the text and format, as well as occasionally using it for prompts on questions on the actual application forms.
- Some also used AI as a research tool to find out more about certain areas or industries which might help their application or asked for advice on how to handle interviews.
- Some described the reverse, where potential employers were using AI to screen for bots, review applications, and even conduct initial interviews.
- A few mentioned that their interviews were conducted through a chatbot, which seemed to be a neutral experience for some. However, a few others said this was frustrating as the bot didn't always understand their responses.

*“It helped me answer questions on the application form which made filling it out a lot easier”*

FEMALE, 25-34, \$25,000+, BLACK, HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

*“It helps you to think of what to say or which words would work well”*

FEMALE, 25-34, \$50,000 - \$74,000, BLACK, BACHELOR'S DEGREE

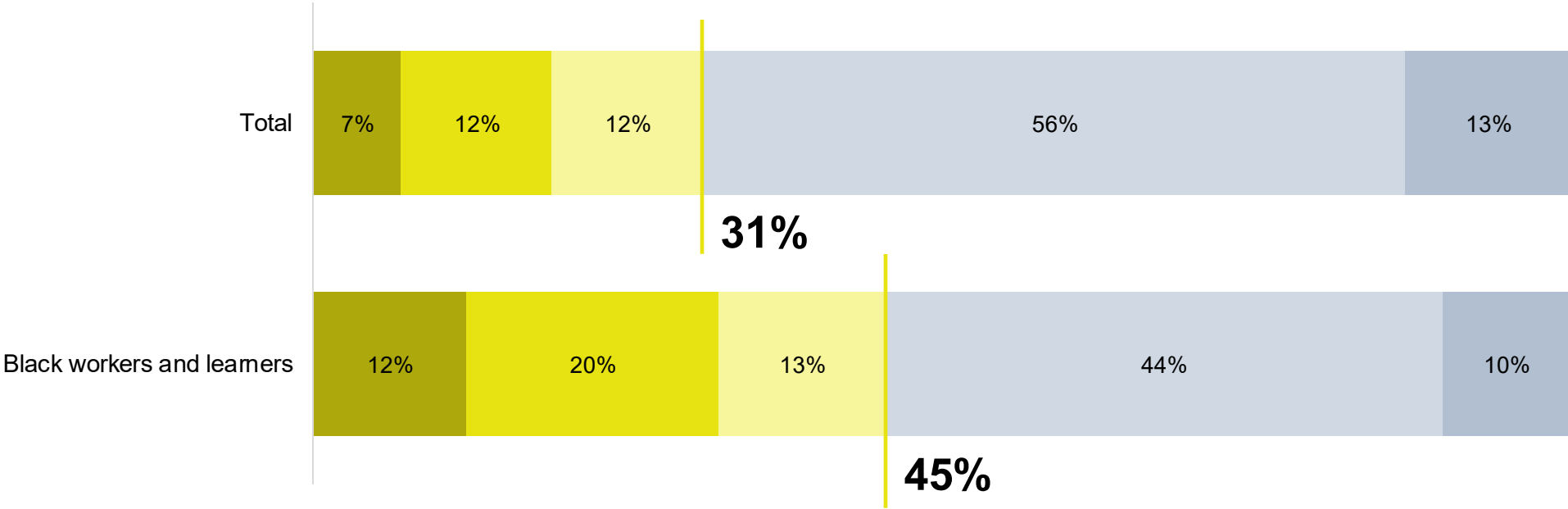
# AI for career transformation: almost half of Black workers and learners are influenced by AI in terms of changing their careers



45% of Black workers and learners had changed or planned to change their careers due to the impact of AI. This is a figure significantly higher than that of the overall population sample (31%).

- Yes, I have changed my plans and am actively pursuing a different career as a result of the impact of AI
- Yes, I am considering changing my career paths or work in the near future as a result of the impact of AI
- I'm considering changing my career paths / work someday, but not in the near future, as a result
- No, I don't believe I need to change career paths as a result of the impact of AI
- Don't know/Not sure

## CHANGED PLANS OR CHANGING PLANS AS A RESULT OF THE IMPACT OF AI



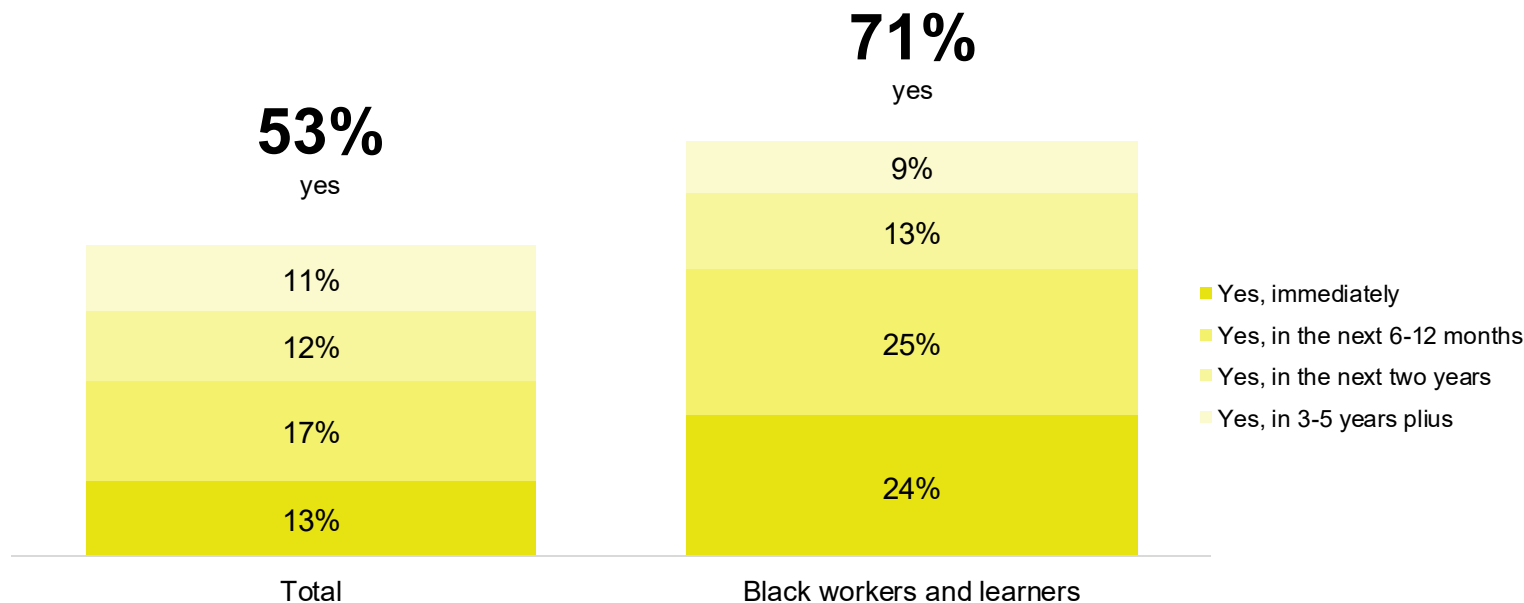
Q.: Has the impact of AI influenced the career paths or work you are considering for the future?

# AI skills gap: a perceived need to upskill particularly high among Black workers and learners

71%

of Black workers and learners feel the need to gain new skills as a result of the impact of AI tools on their work or education, compared to 53% of the total.

## TIMEFRAME FOR GAINING SKILLS



Q: Do you feel the need to gain new skills as a result of the impact of AI tools on your work or education and, if so, in what timeframe?

Male Black workers and learners were more likely than females to feel a need to enhance their skills (77% vs. 62%).

A perceived need for additional skills as a result of AI impact was heavily linked to age.

Almost 80% of Black workers and learners aged 16-34 felt a need to upskill. This compared with 67% of those aged 35-54 and 52% of those aged 55+.