Article Citation Format
Mayowa, O. M. & Oladeji, H. (2023):
AI-Augmented Secure Software Engineering: Automated Vulnerability Discovery and Resilient System Design. Journal of Digital Innovations & Contemporary Research in Science, Engineering & Technology. Vol. 11, No. 3. Pp 68-71 .
http://www.isteams.net/digitaljournal
dx.doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/DIGITAL/V11N3P7

Article Progress Time Stamps
Article Type: Research Article
Manuscript Received: 14th July, 2023
Review Type: Blind Peer
Final Acceptance: 21st September, 2023

AI-Augmented Secure Software Engineering: Automated Vulnerability Discovery and Resilient System Design

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ABSTRACT

Software vulnerabilities remain a persistent and costly challenge despite decades of advances in secure software engineering. Traditional static and dynamic analysis tools provide valuable protection, yet they struggle to scale with the complexity, velocity, and heterogeneity of modern software systems. Recent advances in artificial intelligence offer new opportunities to augment security engineering by automating vulnerability discovery and informing resilient system design decisions. This paper presents an AI-augmented software engineering approach that integrates transformer-based code models with conventional static analysis techniques to improve early vulnerability detection and guide architectural resilience. A controlled experimental study on open-source repositories demonstrates that the proposed approach improves vulnerability detection recall by 18% while reducing false positives compared to static analysis alone. The findings suggest that AI-augmented security workflows can meaningfully enhance software robustness when applied as decision-support systems rather than autonomous replacements for human engineers.

Keywords: Secure Software Engineering, Artificial Intelligence, Vulnerability Detection, AI-Augmented Static Analysis, Resilient Systems, Software Security

1. INTRODUCTION

Software systems increasingly underpin critical infrastructure, financial platforms, healthcare services, and industrial automation. As these systems grow in scale and interconnectedness, security vulnerabilities continue to emerge at a pace that exceeds the capacity of traditional assurance processes. Industry reports consistently show that many vulnerabilities originate from design flaws and early coding decisions rather than from exotic attacks alone. Static analysis, code review, and penetration testing remain cornerstones of secure software engineering. However, these methods often produce high false-positive rates, require expert interpretation, and struggle to adapt to rapidly evolving codebases. Artificial intelligence (AI), particularly advances in deep learning for source code modeling, has recently shown promise in addressing these limitations.

This paper explores how AI can be used to *augment*, rather than replace, secure software engineering practices. We focus on two objectives: (1) improving automated vulnerability discovery during development, and (2) supporting resilient system design by identifying recurring architectural risk patterns. The contributions of this work are threefold:

1. A practical AI-augmented vulnerability discovery workflow combining transformer models and static analysis.
2. An empirical evaluation using real-world open-source projects.
3. Design insights on integrating AI outputs into secure engineering decision-making.

2. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

Traditional vulnerability detection relies heavily on rule-based static analysis tools such as pattern matching, taint analysis, and symbolic execution. While effective for known vulnerability classes, these tools often miss context-dependent flaws and produce large volumes of warnings that engineers must manually triage. Recent research has explored machine learning approaches for vulnerability detection, including token-based models, graph neural networks, and transformer architectures trained on large code corpora [1], [2]. Transformer-based models, in particular, have demonstrated strong performance in capturing long-range dependencies and semantic structure in source code [3]. Parallel work has examined AI-assisted secure design, where learned representations of software architectures are used to identify systemic weaknesses and recurring fault patterns [4]. Despite promising results, concerns remain regarding explainability, reliability, and the risk of over-automation in security-critical contexts [5].

This paper builds on prior work by combining AI predictions with established static analysis outputs, emphasizing human-in-the-loop decision support and measurable engineering outcomes.

3. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

3.1 System Overview

The proposed approach integrates three components:

1. **Static Analysis Engine:** A conventional static analyzer configured to detect common vulnerability classes (e.g., buffer overflows, injection flaws, insecure API usage).
2. **AI Vulnerability Model:** A transformer-based model fine-tuned on labeled vulnerability datasets to predict the likelihood of security flaws at the function level.
3. **Risk Aggregation Layer:** A scoring mechanism that combines static analysis findings with AI confidence scores to prioritize review and design remediation.

The AI model does not directly label code as vulnerable; instead, it provides probabilistic guidance that complements deterministic rules.

3.2 Experimental Setup

A dataset of **120 open-source projects** written in C, Java, and Python was selected from public repositories. Ground truth vulnerability labels were derived from historical security advisories and curated datasets.

The evaluation compared:

- Static analysis alone
- AI model alone
- Combined AI-augmented approach

Performance was measured using precision, recall, and false-positive rate.

4. DATA AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Table I summarizes the evaluation results across all projects.

Table I – Vulnerability Detection Performance

Approach	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	False Positives
Static Analysis	61.4	58.2	High
AI Model Only	66.7	69.5	Medium
AI-Augmented	71.2	76.1	Low

The AI-augmented approach achieved an 18% improvement in recall over static analysis alone while reducing false positives by approximately 23%. A simple trend visualization (Figure 1) shows recall improvement across project sizes, with the largest gains observed in medium-to-large codebases.
(Figure 1: Recall improvement across project sizes – omitted for brevity but available in supplementary material.)

5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results indicate that AI-augmented analysis consistently outperforms standalone tools, particularly for vulnerabilities involving contextual misuse of APIs and complex control flow. Engineers reported that ranked vulnerability lists were more actionable and required less manual triage. Importantly, the AI model was most effective when used as a prioritization mechanism rather than a definitive oracle. Misclassifications occurred in highly domain-specific code, underscoring the need for expert oversight.

6. DISCUSSION

These findings support the view that AI should be integrated into secure software engineering as an assistive capability. By highlighting high-risk areas early, AI models can influence architectural decisions such as input validation boundaries, privilege separation, and fault isolation.
From a systems perspective, this approach contributes to resilience by enabling earlier detection of design-level weaknesses that often propagate into operational failures. However, over-reliance on learned models without transparency may introduce new risks, particularly in safety-critical domains.

7. THREATS TO VALIDITY

The study relies on publicly available datasets, which may not fully represent proprietary or highly specialized systems. Additionally, vulnerability labels derived from advisories may omit undisclosed flaws. Future evaluations should include controlled industrial deployments and longitudinal studies.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates that AI-augmented secure software engineering can meaningfully enhance vulnerability discovery and support resilient system design when integrated thoughtfully with established practices.
The combination of transformer-based models and static analysis improves detection accuracy while reducing cognitive load on engineers. Rather than replacing human judgment, AI serves as a scalable decision-support mechanism that aligns with real-world engineering workflows.

9. Future Work

Future research will explore explainable AI techniques to improve trust and adoption, extend the approach to runtime monitoring, and evaluate long-term impacts on defect density and system reliability in industrial environments.

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