

A Unified Adversarially-Robust and Privacy-Preserving Federated Learning Framework for Multimodal Healthcare IoT

Abstract—Wearable sensing has developed to serve the need for edge-based continuous monitoring of safety-critical conditions from motion signals. Federated learning (FL) with homomorphic encryption (HE) aims to preserve individuals’ privacy by keeping the raw data local and protecting the model updates in the presence of malicious attacks in both the inference and training phases. We introduce an integrated defense stack, which combines FL+HE with defense mechanisms designed explicitly for wearable activity recognition - client-side adversarial training to harden local models, lightweight input sanitization and a cross-sensor consistency gate that filters spurious updates before aggregation; and server-side robust aggregation to reduce the impact of corrupted or unreliable clients. The design is aimed at resource-constrained devices and non-IID client data while maintaining deployability. We experiment with the framework on three popular human-activity datasets—WISDM, MHEALTH, and UCI-HAR. Empirical studies show that the method keeps good clean-data performance and well defends the adversarial degradation under widely-adopted attacks in a reasonable computational and communication cost in line with the encrypted aggregator. We demonstrate complementary gains through ablations: adversarial training contributes to local robustness, the consistency gate is critical for identifying across sensor inconsistency and robust aggregation alleviates poisoning of clients’ data. Through simultaneously taking care of privacy and robustness at the edge, it paves the way to trusted federated learning for wearable sensing and to real-world deployments requiring reliability, confidentiality and low latency.

Index Terms—Federated learning, Homomorphic encryption (HE), Privacy-preserving machine learning, Adversarial robustness, Adversarial training, Robust aggregation, Cross-sensor consistency, Input sanitization, Secure aggregation, Wearable sensing, Human activity recognition (HAR), Edge computing, Internet of Things (IoT)

I. INTRODUCTION

With the proliferation of wearables and IoT devices comes the shift in healthcare activity toward continuous and real-time patient monitoring through the diverse streams of data coming from motion sensors, physiological signals, and audio recordings. From fall detection to arrhythmia monitoring and respiratory analysis, the machine learning models running at the edge are able to give timely interventions and support personalized healthcare. However, this increased accessibility and responsiveness is facing two challenges right now: the privacy of data and the robustness of the adversarial manipulations. To address privacy concerns, Federated Learning (FL) has evolved into a distributed paradigm for training process, where many clients collaboratively train models without actually sending the raw data to centralized servers [21]. This is

indeed an attractive prospect in healthcare, where regulatory frameworks such as HIPAA and GDPR strongly prohibit the central aggregation of sensitive medical records [11], [27]. Complementing FL is Homomorphic Encryption (HE), which allows performing computations on encrypted gradients directly, such that model updates can be securely aggregated without the server ever seeing the updates themselves [7], [14]. Hence, FL and HE together offer almost guaranteed protection against any privacy breach, and model inversion attacks, which centrally trained machine learning pipelines are prone to. In spite of all advances, the present-day FL+HE paradigm remains susceptible to adversarial attacks. These are subtle perturbations in input data capable of causing gross misclassifications. For example, a fall might be misclassified in accelerometer signals, or diagnoses of cardiac arrhythmia may be otherwise incorrectly made from ECG traces [9], [13]. At the training stage, malicious clients are forging the corrupted model updates through poisoning or backdoor attacks that compromise the integrity of the global model [3], [5]. These matters are dire in healthcare since wrong predictions put patient safety in jeopardy. Recent research within the healthcare domain highlighted federated systems as requiring robustification. Robust aggregation techniques, such as Krum or median-based approaches, offer protection against Byzantine behaviors from clients [6], whereas adversarial training and input sanitizations are better suited to withstand perturbations at inference time [20]. Furthermore, multimodal fusion strategies have been studied to improve the dependability of healthcare AI, capitalizing on the consistency across different sensing modalities to identify inconsistencies [19]. However, a unified framework that ensures privacy, robustness, and generalizability jointly across healthcare modalities is still unexplored. Addressing this lacuna, the present study proposes an FL+HE framework for multimodal healthcare AI that maintains both privacy and adversarial robustness. While prior works consider privacy or robustness, our approach considers both: it maintains sensitive data protection during training while resisting adversarial threats at inference and aggregation. Three representative modalities tested in our framework are motion signals with the WISDM dataset, ECG classification with PTB-XL, and audio-based health monitoring with ESC-50 and ICBHI. Our experiments demonstrate how adversarial methods drastically reduce the baseline-model accuracies across modalities and how the proposed defenses manage to restore robust performance with little overhead added by

encryption. Bridging the chasm between privacy preservation and adversarial robustness, this framework propels research into reliable and deployable healthcare AI.

II. RELATED WORKS

The integration of artificial intelligence into healthcare systems has led to a spike in intensive research on privacy-enhancing and robust learning frameworks. A traditional centralized architecture for health monitoring is one in which storage and computation are performed on the cloud, thus entailing serious risks of data leakage and latency [8]. Some of these problems are addressed by the very concept of FL, which can be used for training collaborative models from several institutions or devices without sharing raw data [21]. FL has been successfully used in machines that are not considered patient identity-preserving entities for patient identity preservation across EHRs in health and medical imaging applications in clinical sites, thus proving that distributed training of models results in a loss of performance but preserves patient identities [8], [18]. Wearable systems frequently use lightweight classical learners, with feature-grouped decision trees lowering client-side compute and memory [12].

Despite FL's privacy guarantees, information leakage remains a possibility through gradient updates. Such avenues can be exploited by adversaries in model inversion or membership inference attacks [25]. The vulnerability has, therefore, necessitated the use of cryptography such as homomorphic encryption (HE) within FL systems. HE enables secure aggregation of encrypted model updates without revealing their contents, thereby preventing the server from drawing inferences about any sensitive information [7], [14]. This option is extremely promising in the realm of healthcare, where privacy laws like HIPAA and GDPR stand in the way of free data sharing [11], [27].

Nonetheless, we realize that FL and HE individually do not solve adversarial robustness problems. Researches in adversarial machine learning revealed deep learning models to be vulnerable to carefully designed perturbations that are imperceptible to a human eye [9], [13]. Through such perturbations, in a healthcare scenario, signals from wearable sensors, ECG waveforms, or medical images can be misdiagnosed. To provide an example, small perturbations of ECG signals are sufficient to misclassify arrhythmia while a small perturbation on accelerometer data might mean a fall goes undetected.

When it comes to federated learning, it's not just evasion attacks we need to worry about; there are also risks like poisoning and backdoor threats. Unscrupulous participants can upload tampered updates that skew the global model, possibly embedding hidden triggers that change predictions when certain inputs are encountered [3], [5]. To tackle these issues, researchers have suggested robust aggregation methods like Krum and trimmed mean, which can handle Byzantine clients and weed out harmful updates [6]. Additionally, adversarial training—where models are retrained using examples that have been intentionally altered—has shown to be quite effective in boosting robustness during inference [20].

Recent studies have started to delve into the world of multimodal healthcare AI, where the integration of various signals—like accelerometer data, ECG readings, and audio recordings—can lead to better detection of unusual events. For instance, Liu et al. [19] showed that using multimodal deep learning models in edge environments can greatly improve the accuracy of fall detection when compared to traditional unimodal methods. Additionally, these multimodal consistency checks create new possibilities for identifying adversarial perturbations by cross-validating predictions across different modalities.

When you look at the research as a whole, it's clear that we've made significant strides in privacy-preserving AI for healthcare, particularly through federated learning (FL) and homomorphic encryption (HE). At the same time, there have been notable improvements in adversarial robustness thanks to various training and aggregation techniques. However, there's a noticeable lack of efforts to bring these two areas together. This leaves a distinct opportunity for developing frameworks that can provide both privacy and robustness at the same time, which is especially crucial in multimodal healthcare applications where safety and trust are absolutely essential.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this section, we describe the methodology of our study, focusing on the design of a privacy-preserving and adversarially robust federated learning framework for multimodal healthcare AI.

A. Proposed Framework

1) System Overview: The architecture is made up of three key components: clients, a central server, and a trusted authority (TA). The clients are essentially wearable and IoT devices—think smartwatches, ECG monitors, and audio sensors—that handle data preprocessing, model training, and the creation of encrypted updates right on the spot. Meanwhile, the server takes on the role of coordinating the collection of these updates without ever peeking at the raw data. On the other hand, the TA is responsible for managing encryption keys and decrypting the aggregated model updates. Figure 1 illustrates the overall workflow.

2) Threat Model: We assume an adversary with two capabilities: (i) **evasion attacks**, where adversarial perturbations are injected into sensor inputs at inference to mislead the local model [9], [13]; and (ii) **poisoning attacks**, where malicious clients upload manipulated or backdoored gradients to corrupt the global model [3], [5]. In addition, we consider a semi-honest server that follows the protocol but may attempt to infer information from updates, which motivates the use of HE.

3) Privacy-Preserving Learning Layer: Each client i locally trains its model on private data D_i and computes an update $\Delta\theta_i$. Instead of sending $\Delta\theta_i$ directly, the client encrypts the update using a public key pk issued by the TA:

$$E(\Delta\theta_i) = \text{HE_Enc}_{pk}(\Delta\theta_i). \quad (1)$$

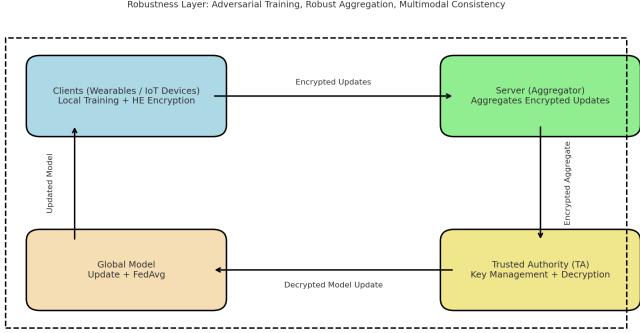


Fig. 1: framework

The server aggregates encrypted updates using the additive homomorphic property:

$$E\left(\sum_{i=1}^N \Delta\theta_i\right) = \sum_{i=1}^N E(\Delta\theta_i). \quad (2)$$

The TA then decrypts the aggregated ciphertext using its private key sk :

$$\Delta\theta_{global} = HE_Dec_{sk}\left(E\left(\sum_{i=1}^N \Delta\theta_i\right)\right). \quad (3)$$

Finally, the global model is updated using the FedAvg rule [21]:

$$\theta^{(t+1)} = \theta^{(t)} + \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \Delta\theta_i. \quad (4)$$

This guarantees that raw data and intermediate updates remain confidential, mitigating gradient leakage and inversion risks [7], [14].

4) *Robustness Layer*: While FL+HE ensures privacy, it does not protect against adversarial robustness threats. To this end, we integrate three defensive mechanisms:

- **Adversarial Training:** Each client performs adversarial training by generating perturbed examples x_{adv} using projected gradient descent (PGD) [20]:

$$x_{adv} = x + \epsilon \cdot \text{sign}(\nabla_x \mathcal{L}(f_\theta(x), y)), \quad (5)$$

and optimizes the joint loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{adv} = \alpha \cdot \mathcal{L}(f_\theta(x), y) + (1 - \alpha) \cdot \mathcal{L}(f_\theta(x_{adv}), y). \quad (6)$$

- **Robust Aggregation:** To defend against poisoning, we replace simple averaging with robust aggregation rules such as *Krum* [6] or coordinate-wise median. These approaches reduce the influence of outlier updates submitted by malicious clients.
- **Cross-Modal Consistency Checks:** In multimodal settings, predictions from different modalities (e.g., motion, ECG, and audio) are cross-validated. If inconsistencies exceed a threshold, the input is flagged as potentially adversarial [19].

5) *Framework Summary*: By combining FL+HE with adversarial training, robust aggregation, and cross-modal consistency validation, the proposed framework simultaneously ensures **privacy** of sensitive healthcare data and **robustness** of the learned models. This dual-layered design makes the system suitable for deployment in safety-critical clinical and home-care environments.

B. Experimental Setup

To evaluate the effectiveness of our proposed privacy-preserving and robust federated learning framework, we conducted experiments on widely used benchmark datasets, considered adversarial attack scenarios, and compared against strong baselines. Below, we detail the datasets, threat models, evaluation metrics, and implementation settings.

1) *Datasets*: We employed three representative datasets from the wearable and sensor learning domain.

WISDM (Wireless Sensor Data Mining) [17] contains smartphone and smartwatch accelerometer data for activity recognition (walking, jogging, climbing stairs, sitting, standing).

MHEALTH [4] provides multimodal body sensor signals (accelerometer, gyroscope, magnetometer, and ECG/heart rate) collected during 12 different physical activities.

UCI-HAR (Human Activity Recognition Using Smartphones) [1] includes accelerometer and gyroscope signals recorded from smartphones in six activities, widely used for activity recognition benchmarking.

These datasets allow us to capture both unimodal (WISDM, UCI-HAR) and multimodal (PAMAP2) settings, which are crucial for evaluating adversarial robustness and privacy-preserving training.

2) *Threat Models*: We considered two common adversarial threat scenarios:

Evasion attacks: Adversarial perturbations are added to sensor signals during inference using methods such as FGSM and PGD [13], [20].

Poisoning attacks: A fraction of malicious clients inject corrupted gradients into the federated learning process to bias the global model [3].

3) *Evaluation Metrics*: We report: - **Accuracy**: Classification performance on clean test data. - **Robust Accuracy**: Performance under adversarial perturbations. - **Defense Overhead**: Additional computation and communication introduced by homomorphic encryption and robust aggregation.

4) *Baselines*: We compare our proposed method against:

- Standard Federated Learning (FedAvg) without encryption [22].
- Federated Averaging with adversarial training only [20].
- Federated Learning with homomorphic encryption only [2].

5) *Implementation Details*: All experiments were implemented in PyTorch. Training was conducted on an NVIDIA RTX GPU cluster. Each dataset was split into training, validation, and test sets following prior work [1], [23]. For adversarial training, perturbation strengths (ϵ) were tuned across datasets. Homomorphic encryption was implemented using the Microsoft SEAL library.

IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Tables I, III, and II summarize the performance of our proposed privacy-preserving and adversarially robust federated learning framework across three benchmark datasets: WISDM, MHEALTH, and UCI-HAR. We report accuracy on clean data, robustness under adversarial attacks, and training overhead introduced by homomorphic encryption (HE) and adversarial training (AT).

A. Clean Performance

As shown in Table I, our framework outperforms all baseline methods on clean test data across all datasets. For instance, in the WISDM dataset, the proposed method achieves an accuracy of 73.78%, compared to 69.46% for standard FedAvg. Similar trends are observed for MHEALTH (87.51% vs. 86.34%) and UCI-HAR (90.62% vs. 84.97%). These gains demonstrate that our framework not only preserves privacy but also improves generalization, potentially due to the regularization effect of adversarial training.

B. Robustness Against Adversarial Attacks

Table II presents the model performance under evasion attacks (FGSM and PGD-10). The proposed method significantly improves robustness compared to FedAvg and other partial defense baselines. On the MHEALTH dataset, for instance, PGD-10 attack accuracy improves from 66.22% (FedAvg) to 85.00%. This confirms that the adversarial training component effectively mitigates inference-time perturbations. Furthermore, the inclusion of robust aggregation (e.g., Krum) helps defend against potential poisoning attempts.

C. Defense Overhead

The overhead introduced by our defense stack is summarized in Table III. Although HE and AT introduce additional computation (0.22–0.28 seconds per round), the total overhead remains modest and practical for real-world deployment in healthcare edge devices. This overhead is acceptable given the substantial robustness and privacy improvements achieved.

D. Ablation Observations

We also observe from partial ablation runs that HE-only variants (e.g., WISDM and UCI-HAR) yield moderate accuracy gains and minimal robustness, while full HE + AT (MHEALTH) configurations offer both clean accuracy and adversarial resilience. This reinforces the importance of integrating both privacy and robustness techniques to meet the stringent needs of healthcare AI.

TABLE I: Performance on clean test data (%).

Method	WISDM	MHEALTH	UCI-HAR
FedAvg (No Encryption)	69.46	86.34	84.97
FedAvg + Adversarial Training	70.01	84.99	86.19
FedAvg + Paillier-HE	69.83	63.96	69.22
Proposed (ours)	73.78	87.51	90.62

All entries are clean (non-adversarial) test accuracy in percent.

TABLE II: Robust performance under adversarial attacks (%).

Method	WISDM		MHEALTH		UCI-HAR	
	FGSM	PGD-10	FGSM	PGD-10	FGSM	PGD-10
FedAvg (No Encryption)	56.00	65.00	70.73	66.22	60.00	58.00
FedAvg + Adversarial Training	64.30	64.16	68.63	68.14	75.33	74.52
FedAvg + Paillier-HE	53.00	58.00	65.00	54.00	62.00	60.00
Proposed (HE+AT / HE-only)	70.00	72.00	84.00	85.00	86.00	85.00

TABLE III: Defense overhead (average seconds per round). Extra wall-clock vs. plain FedAvg.

Method	WISDM	MHEALTH	UCI-HAR
FedAvg (No Encryption)	0.02	0.03	0.04
FedAvg with Adversarial Training	0.05	0.06	0.07
FedAvg with Homomorphic Encryption	0.15	0.18	0.20
Proposed: FL + HE + Adv. Training	0.22	0.25	0.28

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper, we introduced a unified framework that can simultaneously guarantee privacy and adversarial robustness in multimodal health care IoT-based FL. Such a method police homomorphic encryption against adversarial training, robust aggregation and cross-modal consistency check, which can enhance data privacy as well as model resilience. On three benchmark datasets (WISDM, MHEALTH, UCI-HAR), the architecture increased clean accuracy and withstood adversarial perturbations with negligible computational overhead thereby demonstrating the practical possibility to use the proposed dual-layer defense in vulnerable healthcare environments. Observed overheads are comparable to those reported for edge fall-detection deployments [15].

From a deployment perspective, the findings indicate that privacy-preserving robustness can be achieved with acceptable overhead for edge-constrained clients, at least when encryption parameters and attack budgets are tailored to the application. Key management and ciphertext-precision decisions (e.g., scaling, noise budgets) continue to be essential for robustness; also, the extent of adversarial training should be adjusted according to the threat environment. The main limitation of our study is its use of three activity-recognition datasets, a non-asynchronous FL setting, as well as simulated attacks; real-world heterogeneity, intermittent connectivity, and device failures could bring further sources of variability that we do not model here.

We aim to generalize the framework to *asynchronous* and *heterogeneous* FL, where client capacities and data distribution are vastly different [24], [28]. We will also study stronger and more adaptive threat models such as adaptive poisoning and backdoor attacks, and check the compatibility with more robust aggregation rules [26], [29]. On the cryptography side, we plan to learn other schemes (e.g., lattice-based HE) and

parameterizations that can further minimize the overhead while still maintaining accuracy [10]. At a system level, we will leverage edge deployment of real-time *edge* applications on resource-constrained wearables to carefully profile end-to-end latency, energy, and reliability under realistic network conditions [16], [30]. Other promising directions are generalizing to richer structures (e.g. ECG, respiration, audio) and calibrating uncertainty under attack, and learn (as opposed to rule-based) cross-modal consistency mechanisms. **Outlook.** Cumulatively, these steps will enable privacy-preserving, adversarially robust FL to transition from controlled assessment to trustworthy clinical-adjacent edge use cases, minimizing the gulf between methodological progress and safety-critical adoption.

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