



# Smartphone Access and Well-being in Hospitalized Adolescents

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## BACKGROUND

- Smartphones are commonly accessible to adolescents hospitalized for mental health and medical stabilization needs
- Personal devices may support:
  - Coping strategies
  - Social connection
  - Sense of autonomy
- Concerns related to unstructured or excessive smartphone use include:
  - Sleep disruption
  - Emotional dysregulation
  - Reduced engagement in treatment
- Inpatient practices regarding smartphone access vary widely, with limited evidence to guide management during prolonged hospitalizations
- As one of the largest medical stabilization units for adolescent malnutrition in the country, the CHOP Adolescent Unit at KOPH provides care through a robust multidisciplinary team
- Supporting adolescent well-being during extended inpatient stays is a key nursing and interdisciplinary priority

### Clinical Setting:

The CHOP Adolescent Unit at KOPH provides prolonged inpatient medical and psychiatric stabilization through a multidisciplinary team that includes advanced practice nurses, bedside nursing, psychiatry, psychology, nutrition, social work, child life, and creative arts therapies.

## AIM

- To describe smartphone access practices among hospitalized adolescents
- To explore observed indicators of well-being, reflected by participation in therapeutic and nutritional activities
- To examine how structured, in-person therapeutic engagement may support adolescent well-being alongside unrestricted smartphone access
- This project was exploratory and descriptive and did not constitute a formal evaluation

## METHODS

### Evidence Review

- Focused literature review using the Fuld Evidence Hierarchy
- Examined relationships between smartphone use, restriction, and adolescent mental health and well-being

### Clinical Practice/Observation

- Six-month descriptive observational project
- Inclusive of all adolescent patients admitted to the Nutritional Rehabilitation Pathway (NRP)
- Unrestricted smartphone access maintained throughout hospitalization
- Maximum census: 12 patients
- Data collected via Excel-based observation log
- Observed indicator of well-being:
  - Treatment compliance, defined as participation in daily therapeutic and nutritional activities
- No validated behavioral scales, staff workload measures, or statistical analyses were conducted

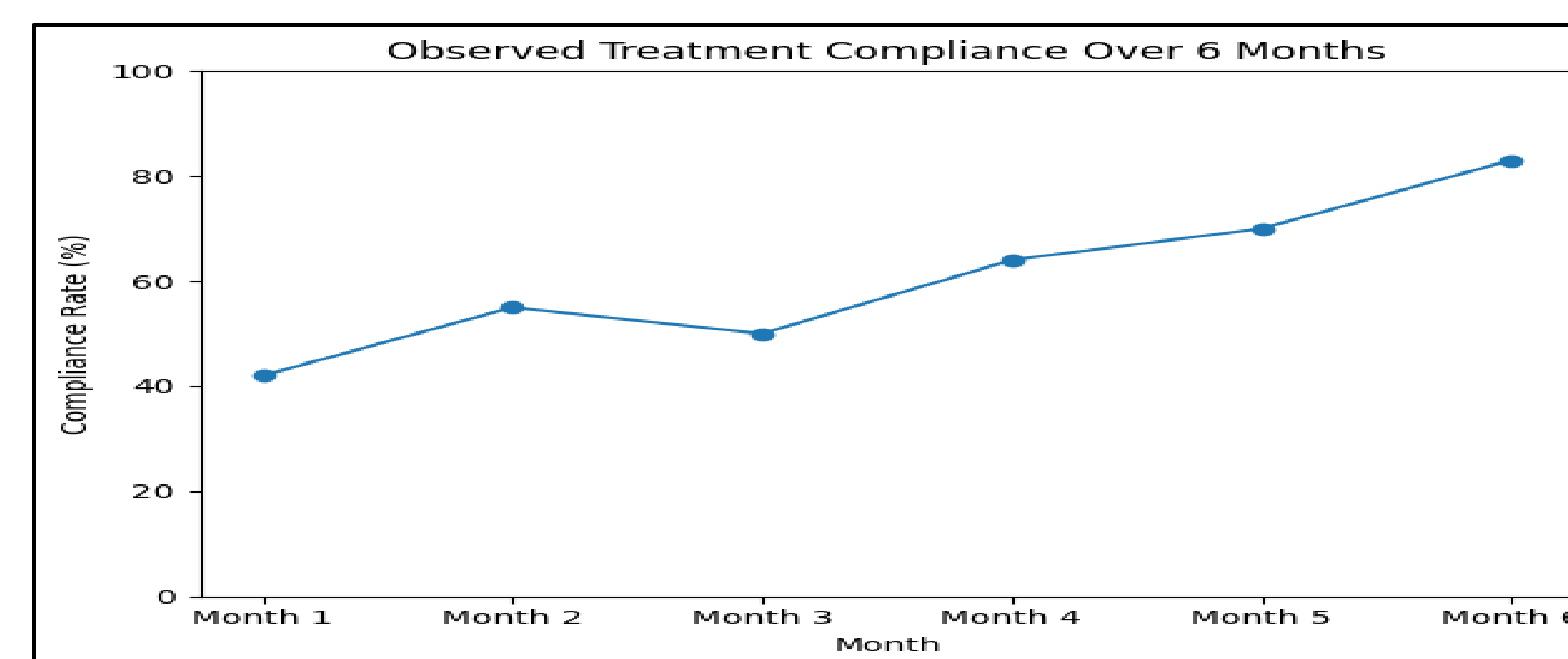


Figure 1. Descriptive trend in treatment compliance over six months among adolescents on a Nutritional Rehabilitation Pathway with unrestricted smartphone access. Data are observational and exploratory.

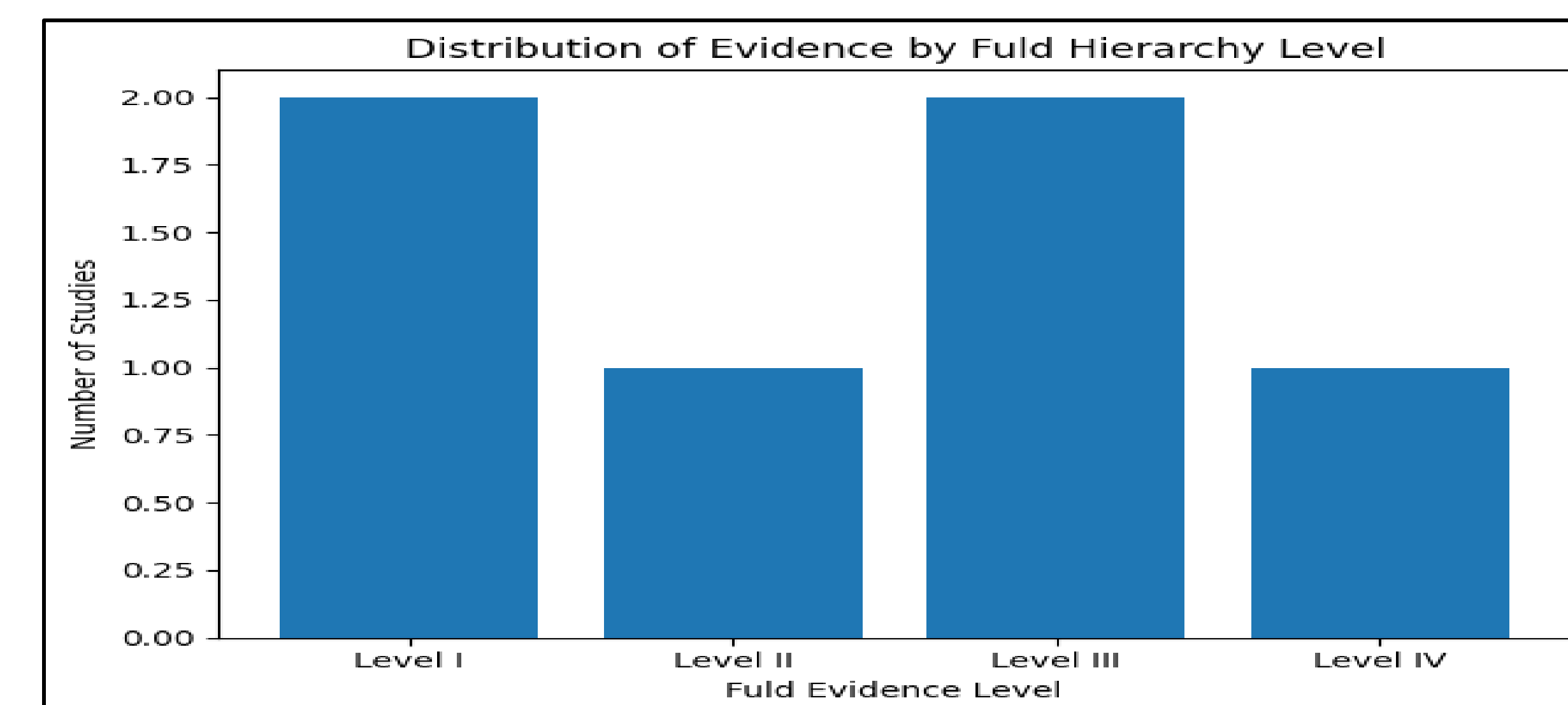


Figure 2. Evidence distribution by Fuld Evidence Hierarchy from a focused review examining smartphone use and adolescent well-being.

## OUTCOMES

- Literature review demonstrated limited evidence supporting mandatory smartphone deprivation in inpatient adolescent settings.
- Unrestricted smartphone access was maintained for all patients.
- A descriptive review of observational data over a 6-month period was conducted; findings were exploratory and not formally statistically evaluated.
- Structured Engagement Interventions: art therapy, music therapy, pet therapy, holistic therapy, and supervised safe spaces with age-appropriate games and movies
- Observed Trends
  - Compliance increased from 50% at baseline to 80% post-intervention (30% absolute increase)
  - Increased peer interaction and participation in therapeutic activities (observational)
  - Fewer behavioral escalations (observational)
  - Improved treatment compliance and more manageable staff workload (observational)
  - Findings are descriptive and exploratory; associations do not imply causation.

## DISCUSSIONS

- In this exploratory project, unrestricted smartphone access paired with structured, developmentally appropriate therapeutic engagement was associated with improved observed participation in inpatient care
- Supporting adolescent well-being during prolonged hospitalization may be best achieved through engagement-focused strategies rather than smartphone restriction
- Further evaluative research is needed to establish standardized, evidence-based smartphone use guidelines in inpatient adolescent settings

### Key Take-Home Message

**Structured therapeutic engagement, not smartphone deprivation, may better support adolescent well-being during prolonged hospitalization.**

**Magnet Alignment:** Structural Empowerment • Exemplary Professional Practice • New Knowledge/Innovation • Emerging Outcomes (descriptive)



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