

COPING WITH LOSS: EFFECTIVENESS OF A STRUCTURED PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR BEREAVED ADOLESCENTS GIRLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Tonya R. Thurman, MPH, PhD
Associate Professor, Tulane University
Director, Highly Vulnerable Children Research Center
Country Director, Tulane International, LLC South Africa



Introduction



- Bereaved children are at increased risk for mental health problems
- Need for informed and appropriate support with the process of grieving and adjustment to loss
- Few evidence-based interventions available

Abangane (*Friends*) Grief Groups



- Grief Groups originally conceived by Khululeka Grief Support Program in Cape Town



- Piloted, adapted, and implemented among adolescents by Social Workers from Child Welfare Bloemfontein & Childline Free State



- Upgrades in collaboration with Tulane HVC-RC to incorporate latest grief theories and cognitive behavioral therapy principles and develop an 8-session structured program

Abangane Grief Groups

- ❑ Session 1: Introduction & relationship building
- ❑ Session 2: Naming, identifying, understanding & normalising feelings
- ❑ Session 3: My personal experience of loss
- ❑ Session 4: Changes in my life resulting from loss
- ❑ Session 5: Rituals, traditions & letting go
- ❑ Session 6: Coping skills
- ❑ Session 7: Looking to the future
- ❑ Session 8: Closure



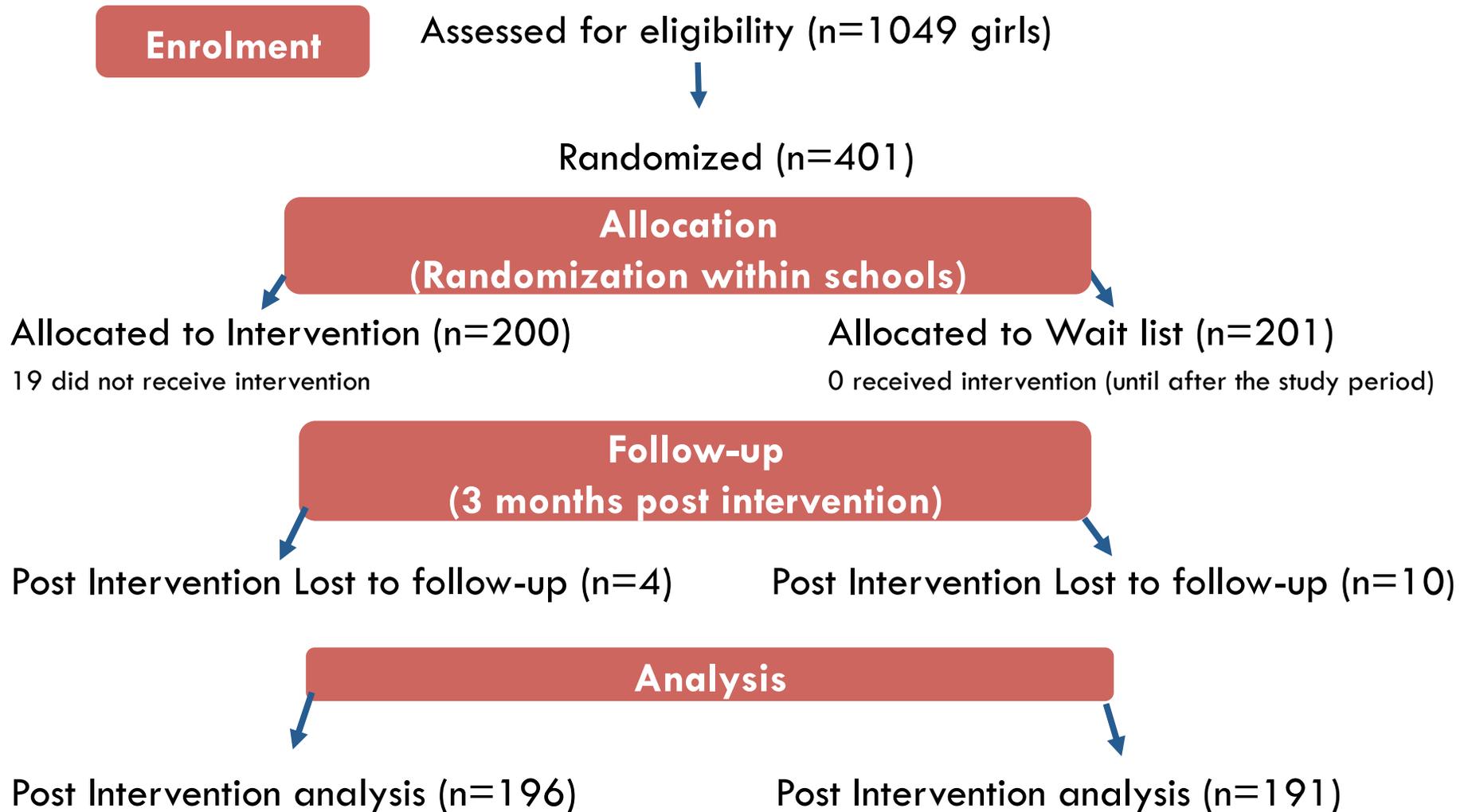
Study Sample



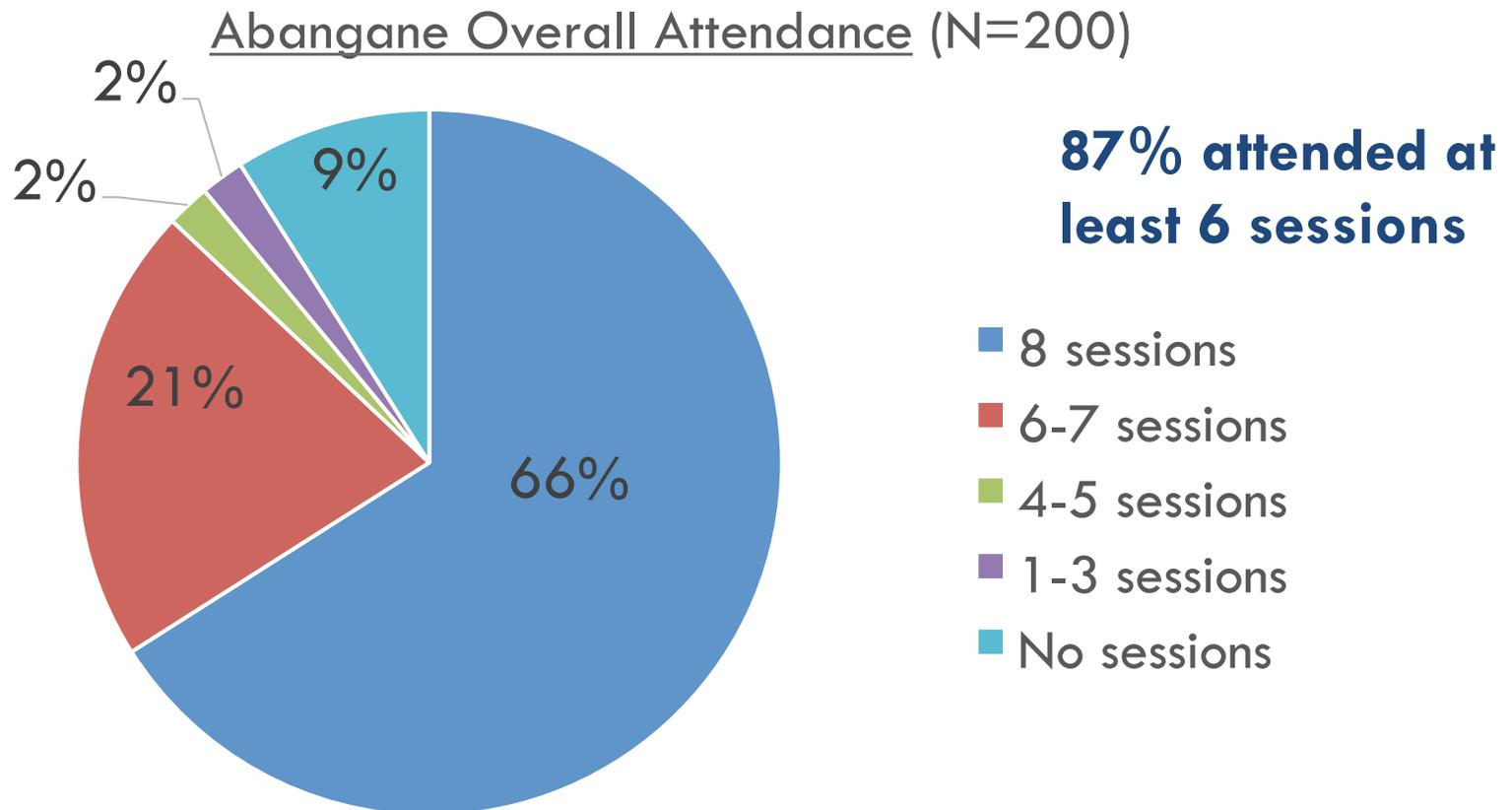
- Program intake form with all learners at 11 schools in the Free State
 - Bloemfontein: 4 schools; 903 learners
 - Clocolan & Ficksburg: 4 schools, 819 learners
 - Parys: 3 schools, 334 learners

- Eligibility criteria:
 - ▣ Female
 - ▣ Enrolled in the 9th grade (13-17 years old; Mean = 14)
 - ▣ Experienced the loss of someone close to them
 - ▣ Expressed interest in participating in the support group

Study Design: RCT Diagram



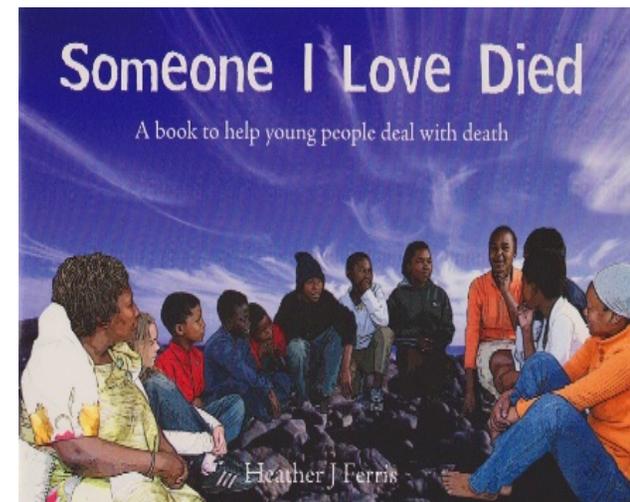
Attendance



To counter attendance problems with the after school program in Term 1, CWBFN & CLFS obtained Department of Education permission to offer the program during school hours

Ethics

- ❑ Informed consent and assent procedures
- ❑ Cognitive interviewing to determine acceptable language for discussing loss to inform survey measures
- ❑ Careful training of interviewers with referral process to Social Workers for distressed participants
- ❑ All participants received a collection of stories reflecting African children's experiences of loss
- ❑ Ethical approval obtained at the University of Free State and Tulane University



Adolescents' Loss Experiences

Loss experiences	Intervention group	Wait group
Experienced more than one loss	49%	44%
Reported parent as loss that affected them the most	47%	44%
Reported grandparent as loss that affected them the most	28%	29%
Average years since 'most affected loss'	4.6 years	4.5 years
Loss due to illness	74%	74%

Primary Study Outcomes

Problematic Grief

- Inventory for Complicated Grief-Revised for Children
 - ▣ Adolescent self-report – 6 items $\alpha = 0.91$
- Intrusive Grief Thoughts Scale
 - ▣ Adolescent self-report – 9 items $\alpha = 0.91$

Depression

- Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale for Children
 - ▣ Adolescent self-report – 20 items $\alpha = 0.87$

Behavior

- Brief Problem Monitor, Child Behavior Checklist
 - ▣ Caregiver report – 19 items $\alpha = 0.83$

Analysis



- Baseline and follow-up data were analyzed using random effects models with program effect estimated with a treatment-by-time interaction term
- Panel models without covariates
 - ▣ Models including age, time since loss, and baseline values of the outcome were ran with similar results

Results: Intervention effects

- 8% significant decrease in Complicated Grief symptoms
 - $IRR = 0.92, p = 0.011, d = -0.173$

- 11% significant decrease in Intrusive Grief Thoughts
 - $IRR = 0.89, p = 0.000, d = -0.262$

- 14% significant decrease in Depression symptoms
 - $IRR = 0.86, p = 0.005, d = -0.179$

- 20% significant decrease in Behavior problems
 - $IRR = 0.80, p = 0.018, d = -0.276$

Programmatic Implications



- Abangane—a culturally adapted, theory-based grief support program—shows promise for mitigating the psychological effects of loss among female adolescents in South Africa.
- Further investment in programme enhancement and longer term follow-up may reveal even more benefits

Acknowledgements

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- Program partners and key personnel
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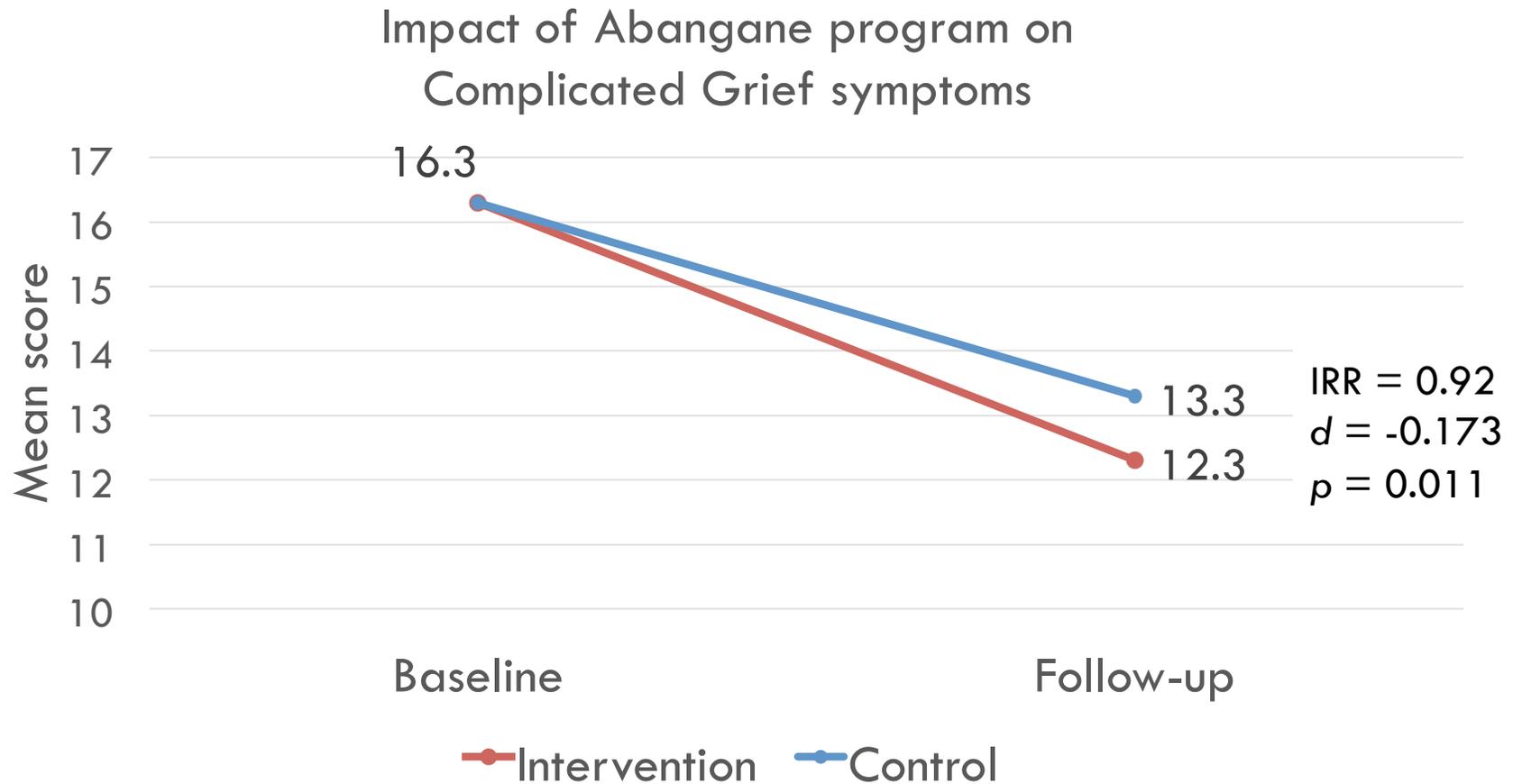
Acknowledgements

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Website: <http://hvc-tulane.org>

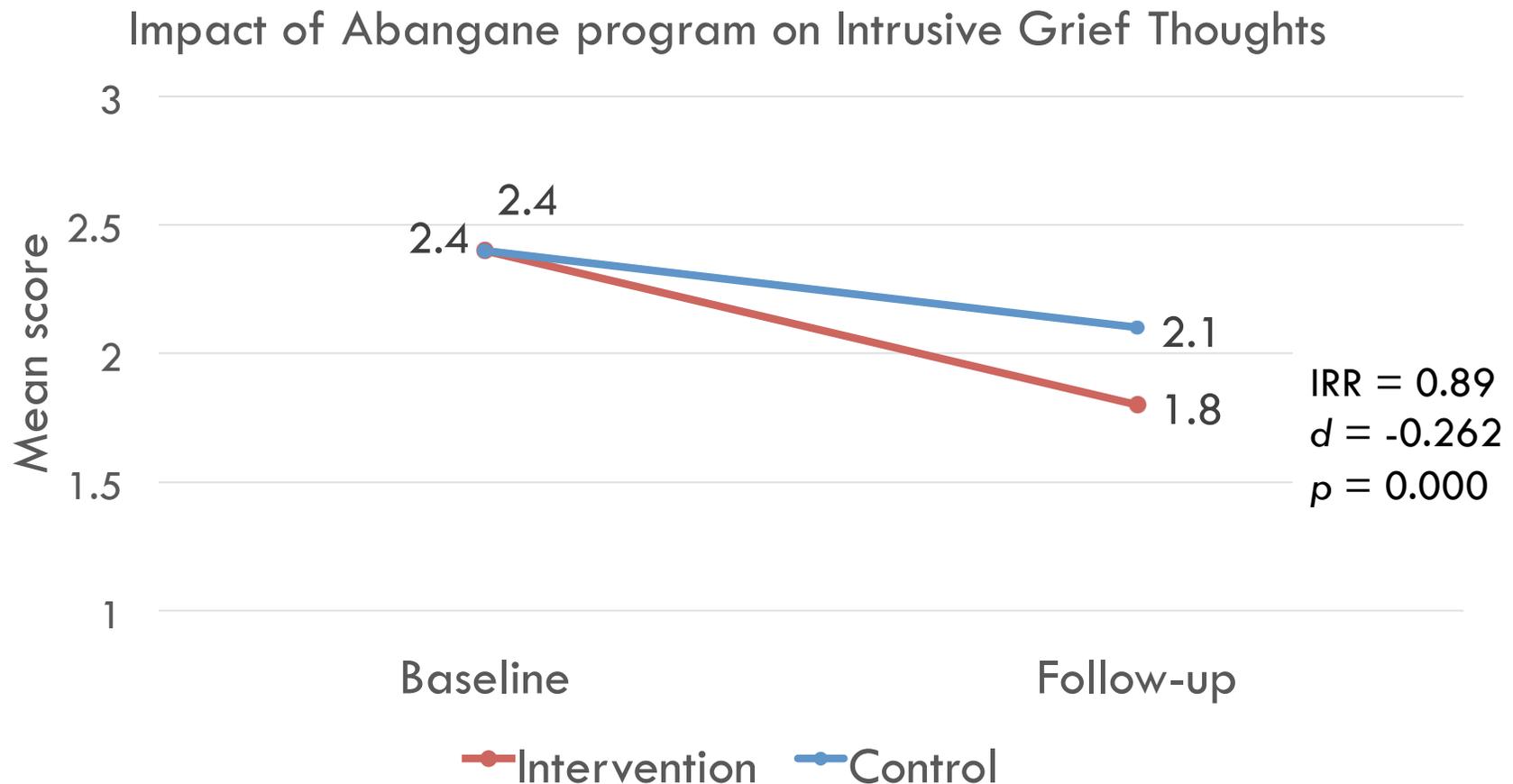


Results: Complicated Grief Symptoms



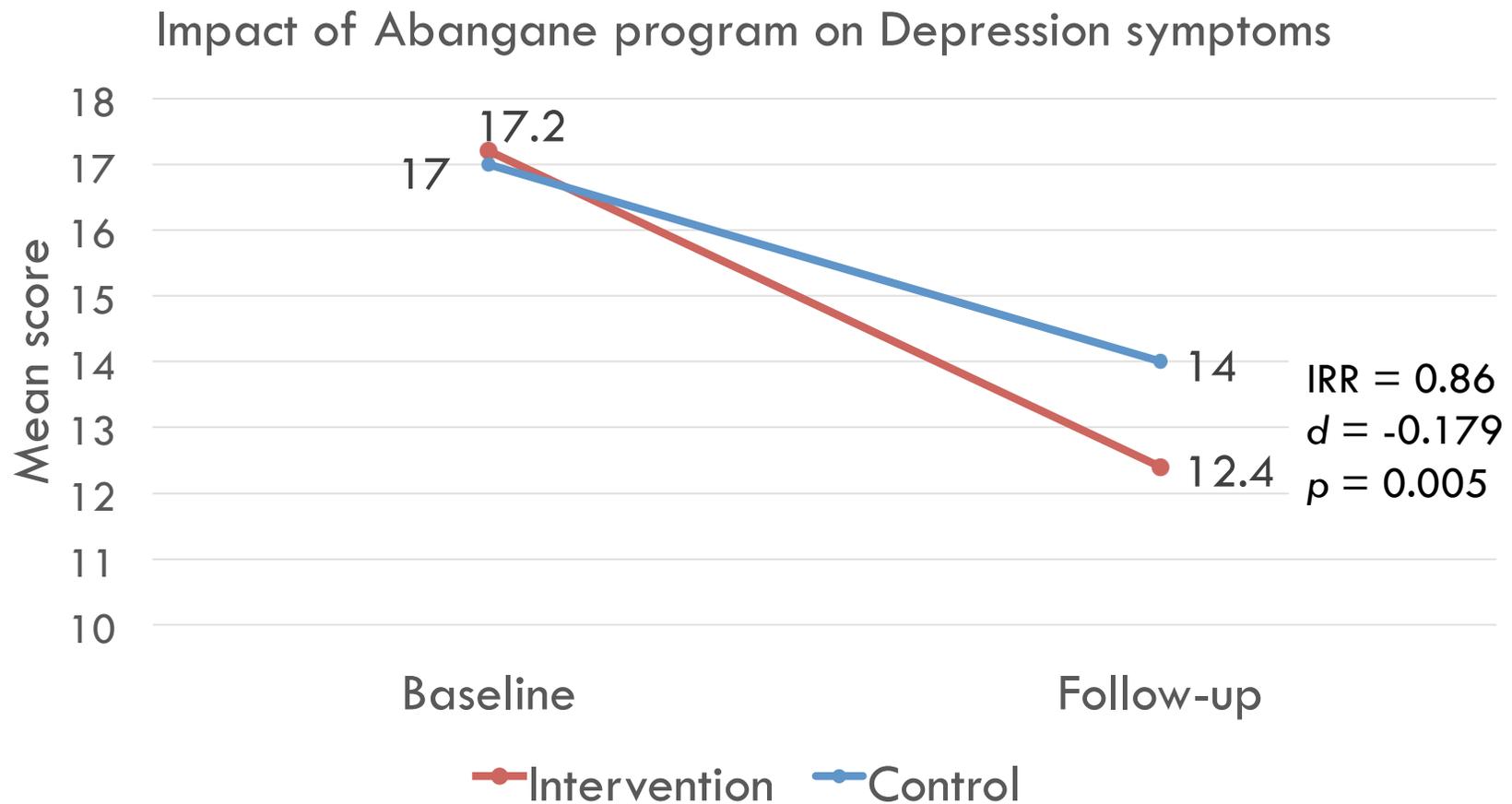
8% significant decrease among participants

Results: Intrusive Grief Thoughts



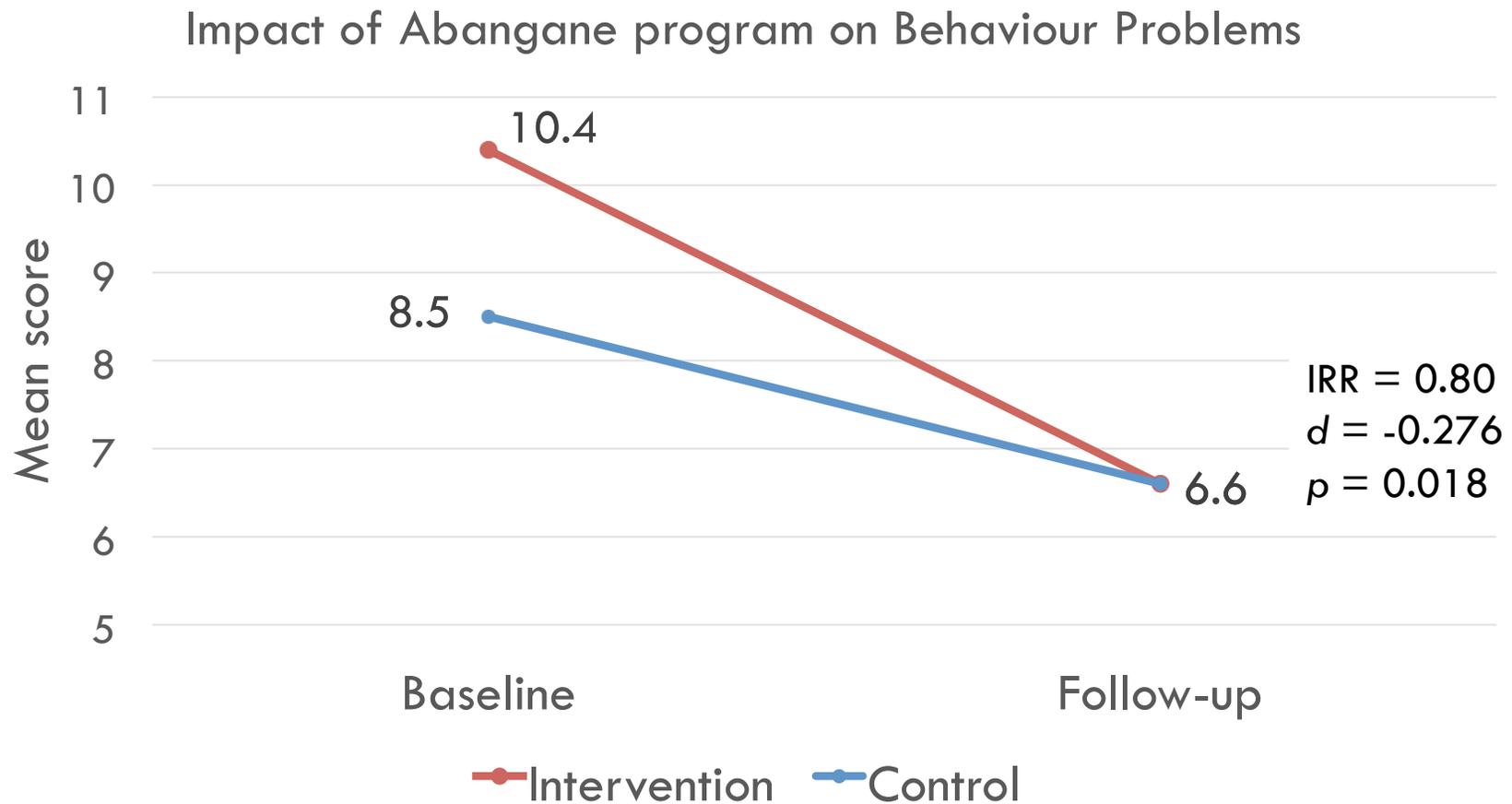
11% significant decrease among participants

Results: Depression



14% significant decrease among participants

Results: Behaviour Problems



20% significant decrease among participants