

CareACT Internet-based ACT for Enhancing the Psychological Flexibility of Elderly Caregivers

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ABSTRACT

Background: It's well known that stress, low quality of life and depression are relatively common problems among caregivers. The proportion of elderly caregivers is rapidly increasing, which emphasizes the need for new support systems for caregivers. Internet-delivered psychological interventions are one possible approach, offering benefits as they are more easily to achieve for caregivers who often are home-bound with their relatives.

Aim: This study will examine whether a telephone-supported Acceptance and Commitment Therapy -based online psychological intervention aiming at enhancing wellbeing would be an effective alternative for promoting caregivers quality of life and alleviating depressive symptoms and psychosocial burden.

Method: The effects of an ACT-based online intervention on caregivers' burden, depressive symptoms, anxiety, quality of life, psychological flexibility, personality and physical performance will be studied by quasi-experimental study design comparing three groups of caregivers. Data collection will be conducted at three time points; baseline, 4 months and 10 months.

The first wave of the intervention and data collection is underway. We will present the preliminary results for the first two measurement points (pre and 4-month) for the intervention group, and discuss the caregivers' experiences of the web-based intervention.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This study will examine whether an ACT-based online psychological intervention aiming at enhancing wellbeing is an effective alternative for meeting the needs of caregivers. We will compare the Internet-based wellbeing program against a standardized rehabilitation program carried out in rehabilitation centers and TAU to find out the most effective ways on promoting caregivers quality of life and alleviating depressive symptoms. The research questions are as follows:

1. Does the supported web-based intervention alleviate burden and depressive symptoms and increase quality of life more than standardized rehabilitation or usual care during 10-months follow-up?
2. Does the caregivers' baseline sense of coherence, psychological flexibility and personality modify the effects of the intervention?

STUDY DESIGN

The effects of an ACT-based online intervention on caregivers' burden will be studied by quasi-experimental study design comparing three groups of 60+ caregivers. Group 1 (n=50) will receive a telephone-supported 12-week ACT-based web-intervention; group 2 (n=50) will receive the standardized rehabilitation program in a rehabilitation center; and group 3 (n=50) will receive support given by voluntary caregiver organizations (TAU) (n=50). Data collection will be conducted at baseline, 4 months and 10 months follow-up.

MEASUREMENTS

Caregivers' burden: COPE-index (McKee et al., 2003)

Depressive symptoms: BDI-II (Beck 2004)

Quality of life: WHOQOL-Bref (Skevington et al. 2004)

Anxiety: GAD-7 (Spitzer, 2006)

Sense of coherence: SOC-13 (Antonovsky 1987)

Psychological flexibility: AAQ-II (Hayes et al. 2004)

Experiential avoidance in caregiving: EACQ (Losada et al., 2014)

Thought Suppression: WBSI (Wegner & Zanakos, 1994)

Personality: The Short Five (S5; Konstabel et al. 2012).

Physical Performance (SPPB; Guralnik et al., 1994)



INTERVENTION (GROUP 1)

In the first wave, 35 caregivers (Mean 72.1 years) started the 12-week supported web-intervention on January 30th, 2017. Psychology students (n=13) interviewed the caregivers before (pre) and after the web-based intervention (4 months) and introduced them to the web program <https://omapolulla.fi/>. The web-based intervention consisted of 6 modules based on the processes of ACT. After each module (2 weeks), caregivers completed an assignment related to the process, and their support person (student) gave them a 10-15 min phone call.

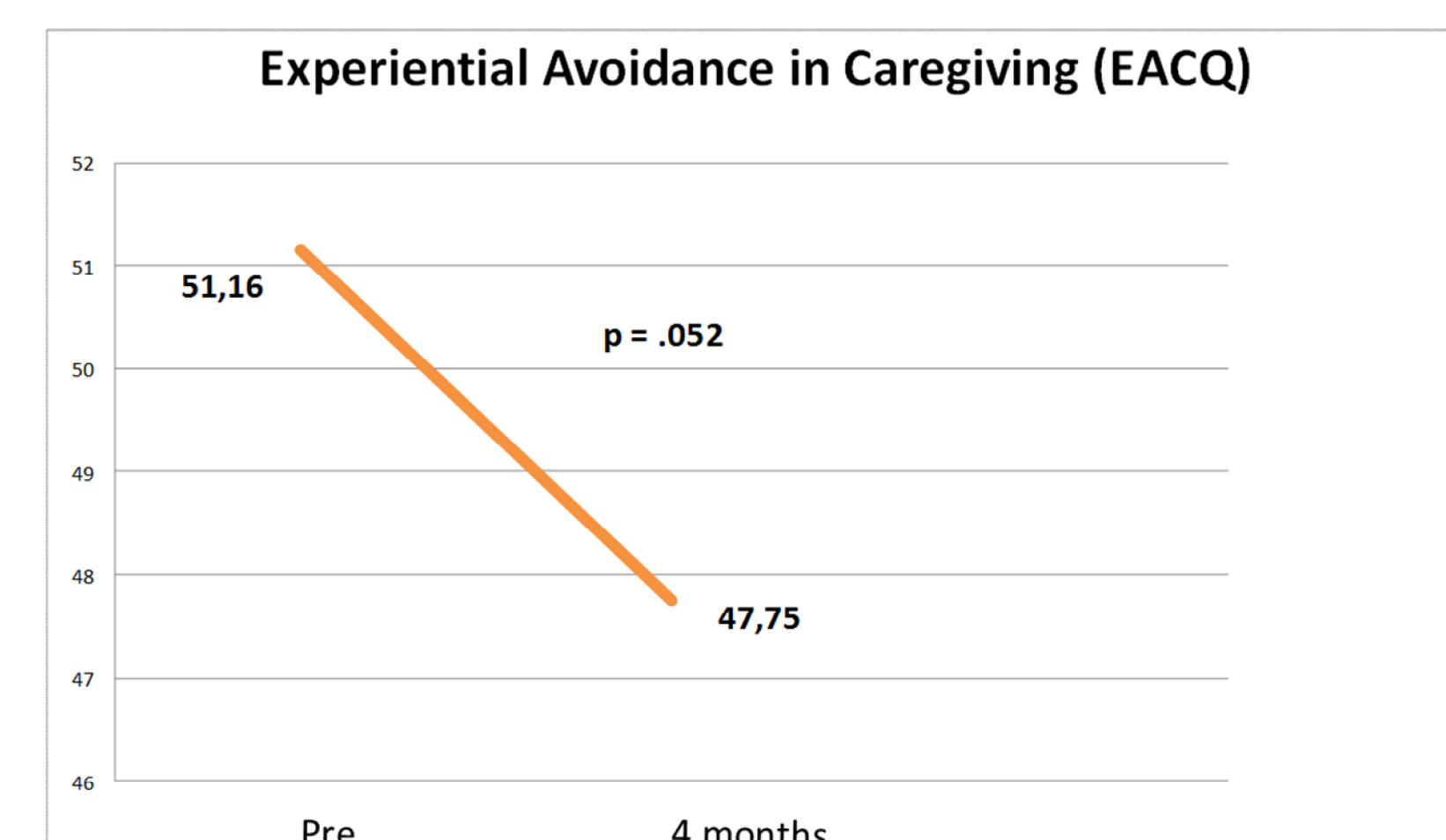
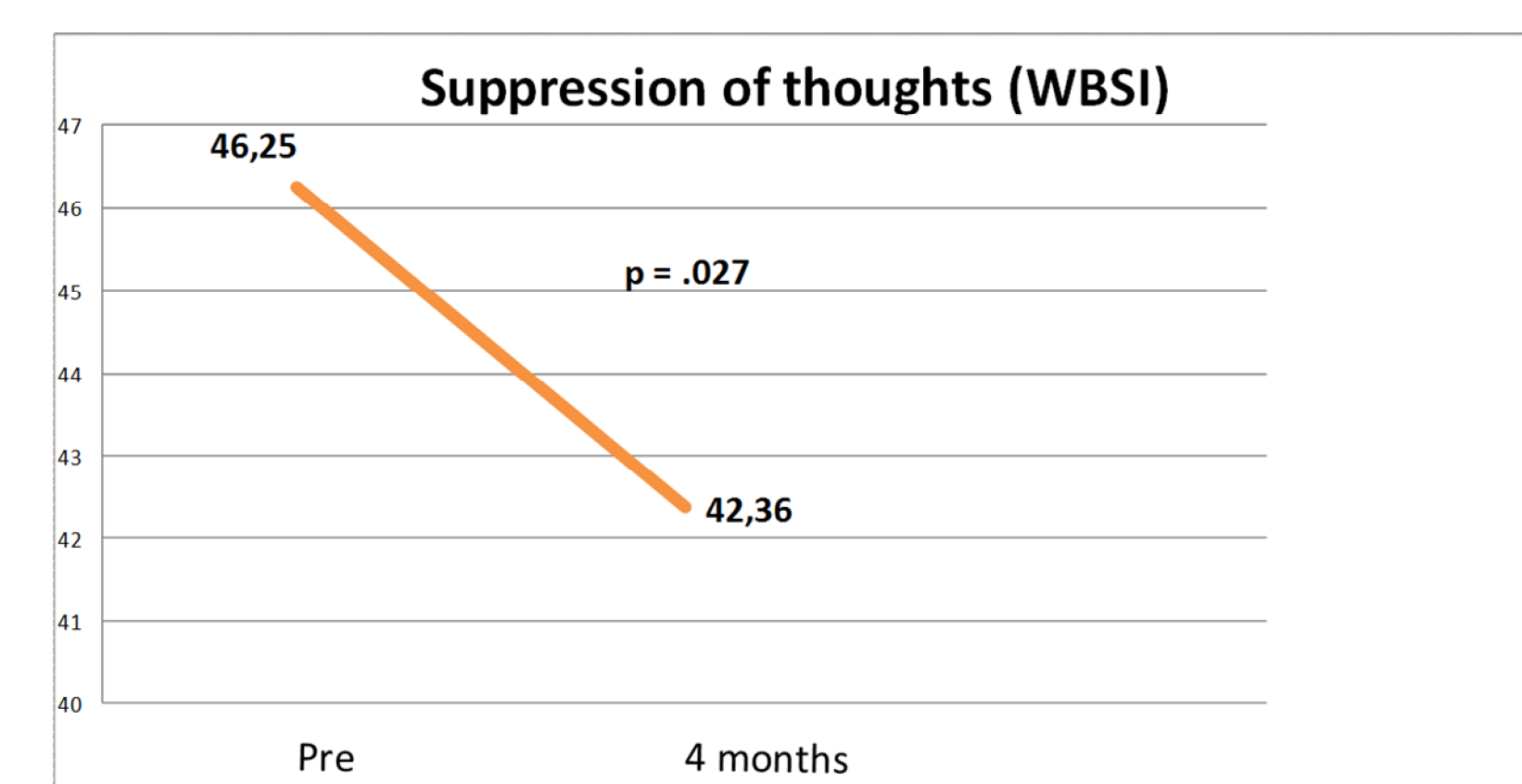
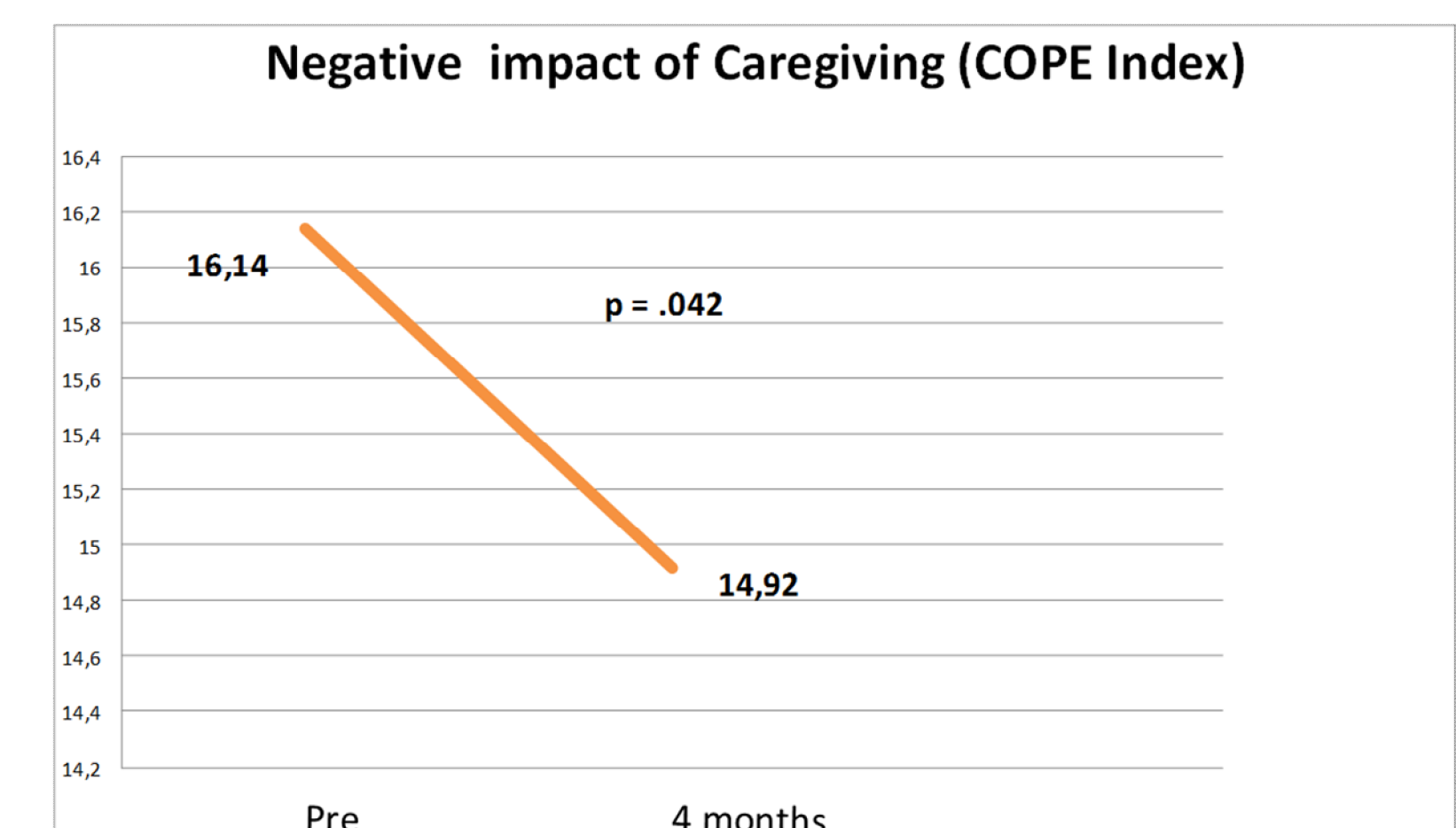
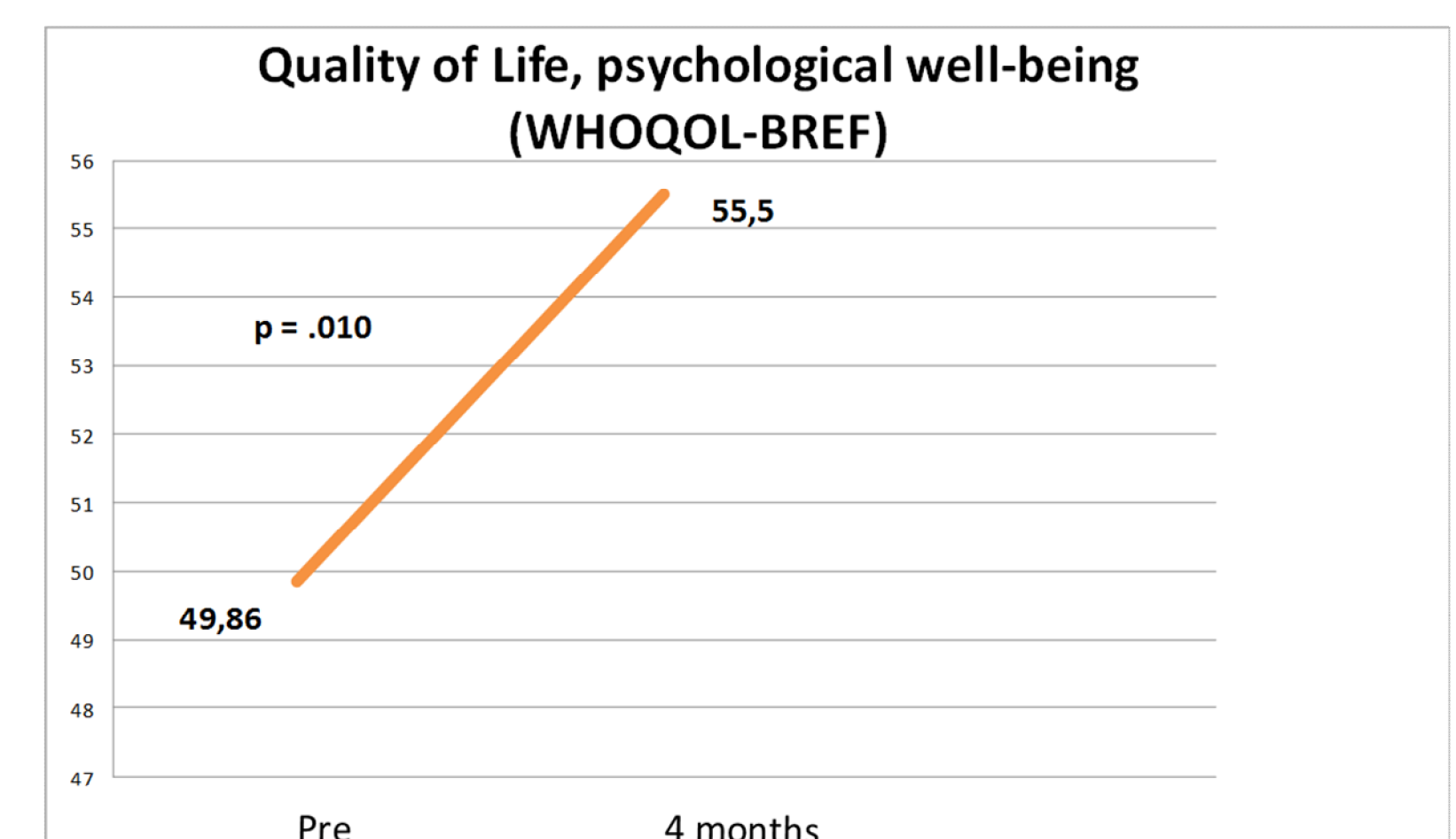
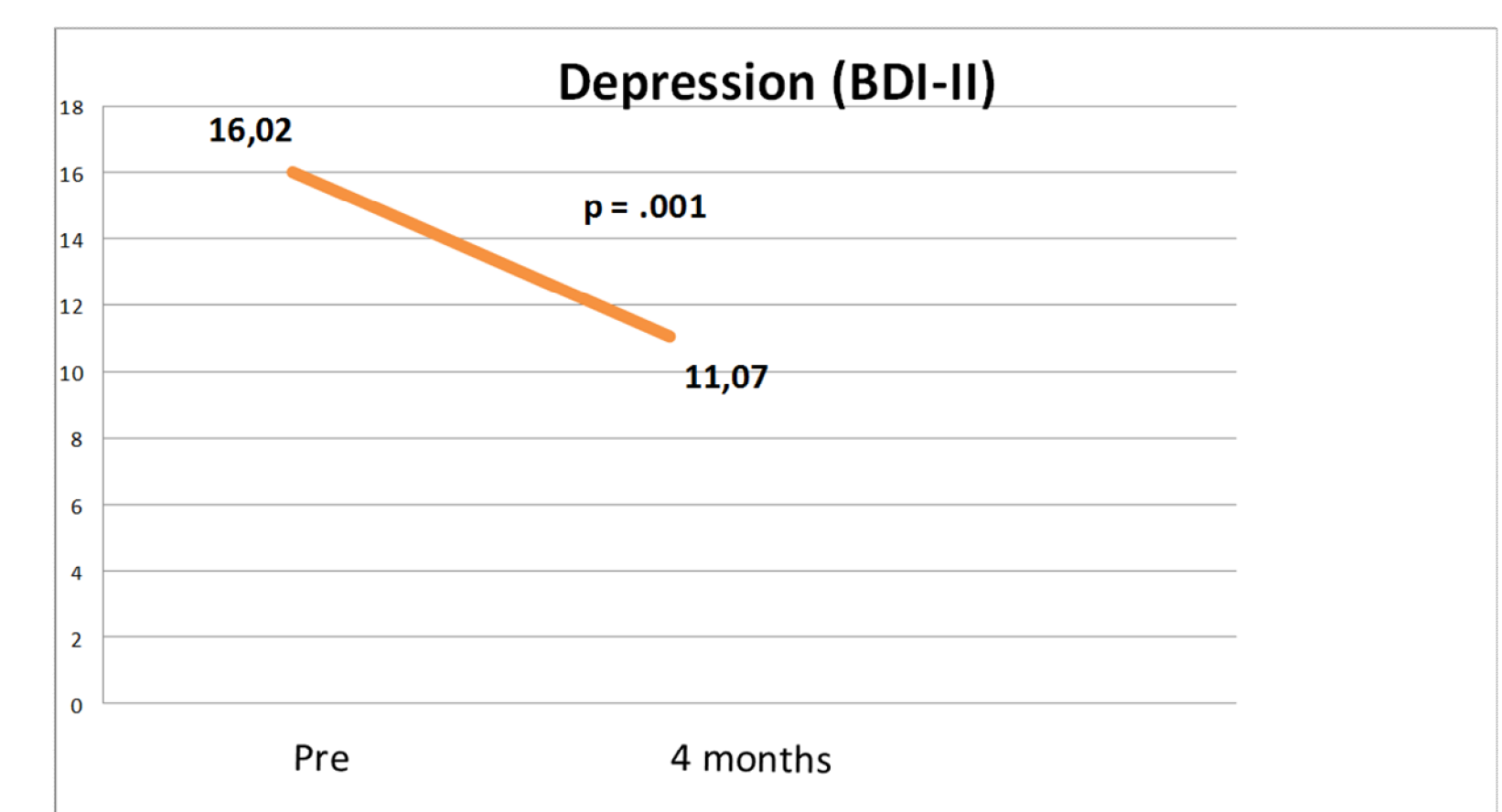
RESULTS OF THE 4 MONTH MEASUREMENT FOR THE INTERVENTION GROUP, FIRST WAVE OF THE DATA COLLECTION (N=28)

After the 12-week web-based ACT intervention, depression, negative impact of caregiving and suppression of thoughts showed a significant decrease and experiential avoidance a nearly significant decrease. In addition, quality of life increased. These are preliminary results of the first wave of the intervention and only of the intervention group. We will continue with data collection in autumn 2017.



CONCLUSIONS

- Preliminary results at 4 months for the intervention group (Group 1) are encouraging.
- However, elderly caregivers are a challenging group, and a telephone supported web-intervention may not be enough to meet the needs of this fragile group



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