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# SYMPOSIUM ON ASSISTANCE TO AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES

26-28 NOVEMBER 2024 // HAARLEM, NETHERLANDS

HOSTED BY



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## Victim Support – Crisis Management and Psychological Care

Jos de Keijser

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# AAAVF Talks

## key messages

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Speaker: Jos de Keijser

State/Organisation: ...



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## Important moments for the bereaved after 14 july 2014

- › **10 November 2014**
- › National Commemoration MH17 in the Amsterdam RAI. We commemorate 298 passengers,
- › including 196 Dutch nationals
- › **10 december 2014**
- › First photo inspection for relatives. Case managers of Victim Support Netherlands support the next of kin together with employees of the LTFO. 32 families make use of the photo inspection.
- › **23 februar 2015**
- › The online catalogue is available for relatives with personal belongings brought to the Netherlands on 7 August 2014
- › **2 march 2015**
- › 533 relatives view the wreckage on the
- › Gilze Rijen Air Base. 'Almost all relatives were
- › happy with the opportunity that was offered. To see the pieces in reality,





- › **25 September 2015**
- › Last flight with victims at Eindhoven Airport. There are also personal belongings on the plane
- › **17 july 2016**
- › MH17 Disaster Foundation organizes the commemoration in the Expo Haarlemmermeer. The theme of the commemoration is 'the sun'. Behind the dark clouds the sun comes out again. It warms, illuminates and brings back some color and vitality

- › **17 july 2017**
- › Official unveiling of the monument MH17







# A tree for all lost persons MH17





## Why processing loss after the MH 17 attack is more difficult.

- › Sudden loss
- › Random (just a normal flight)
- › Suffering of loved ones
- › Third party (perpetrator)
- › Multiple losses
- › No intact body for leave-taking
- › Media attention
- › Financial and legal problems





## › **Manmade: Sudden, perpetrators, trail, media attention**

# **Death due to deliberate human actions leads to more complex grief and PTSD in the bereaved.**

Conclusions of the Groningen Murder study (Boelen, de Keijser et al. 2015, N = 331)

MH17 study (Lenferink et al. 2017, N = 167)

MH17 - right to speak study (Buiter et al. 2022; N= 203)

Traffic studies ( total N = ca 600, Boelen et al. 2022)

9/11 2001 New York (3000<sup>+</sup>)

Breivik, 2011 Norway ( 77<sup>+</sup>)



## Cause of death and complex grief

Difference between:

natural death (approx. 5-10% complex grief);

accidents, natural disasters (Tsunami) and epidemics (Corona) (15-25%)

man-made causes (murder/manslaughter, assault, traffic offenders (60-80%))



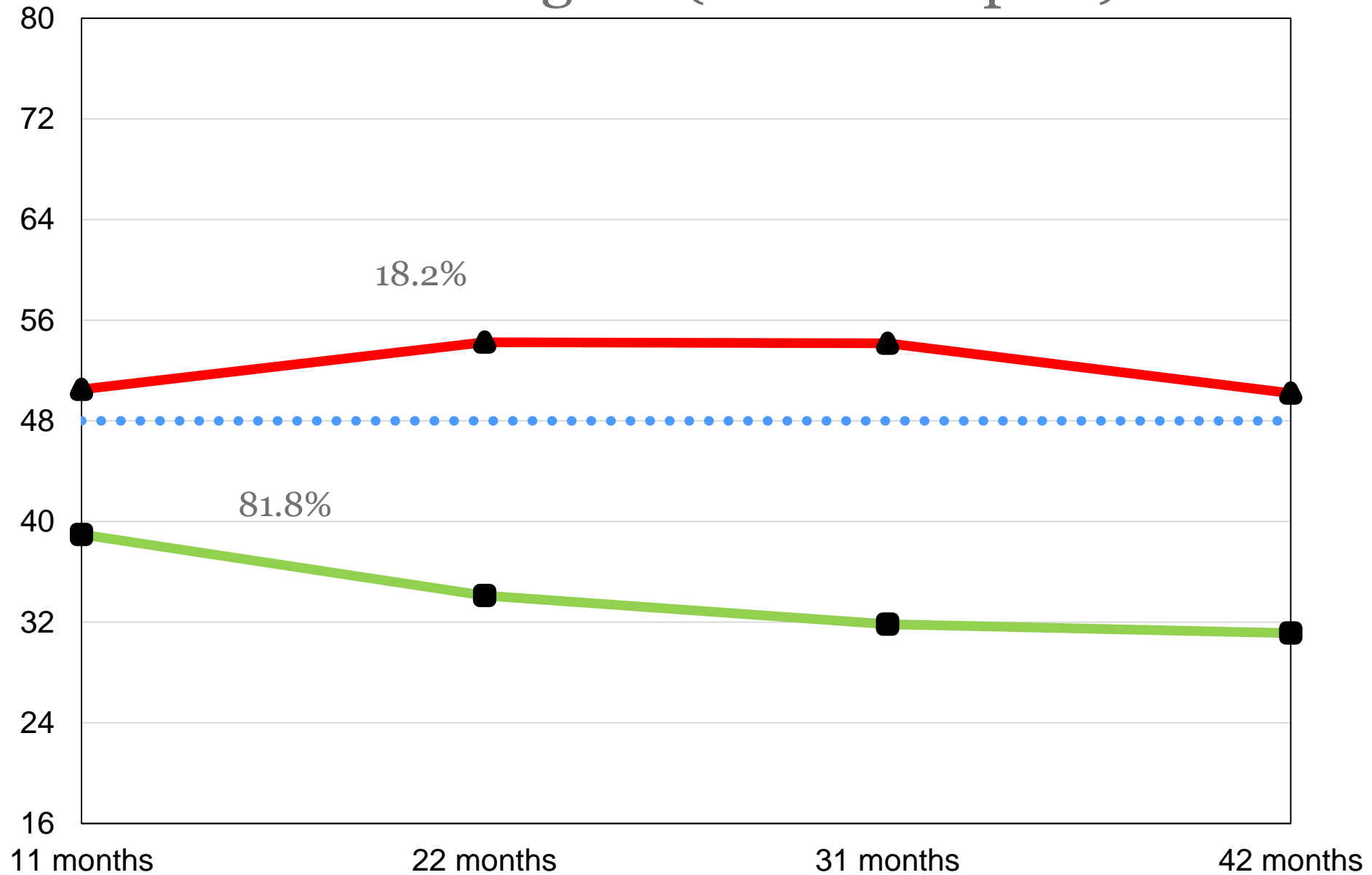
## More than 9 years of research (172 participants)

11

Woman, N (%)	102 (59.3)
Age (years), M (SD)	51.6 (15.5)
High educational level	117 (68.4)
Closest deceased relative is, N (%)	
Partner/spouse	2 (1.2)
Child	48 (28.4)
Parent	15 (8.9)
Sibling	48 (28.4)
Other family member	56 (33.1)
Number of relatives lost, N (%)	
One	54 (31.8)
Two	58 (34.1)
Three	22 (12.9)
At least four	36 (21.2)
Unique victims	192



## Course of grief (red = complex)





## Amount of complex grief

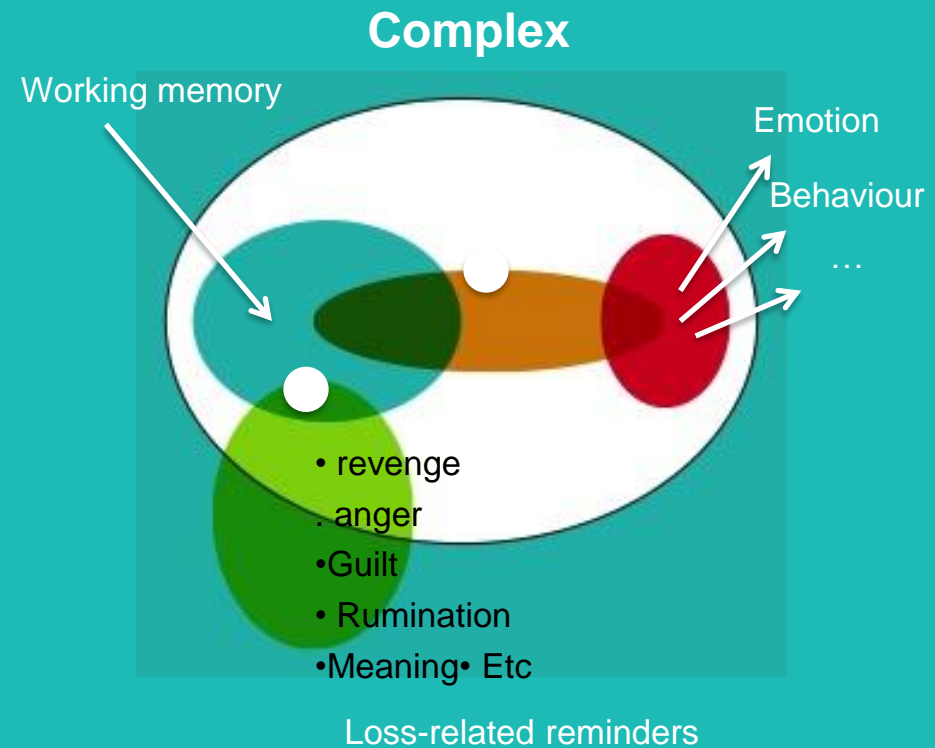
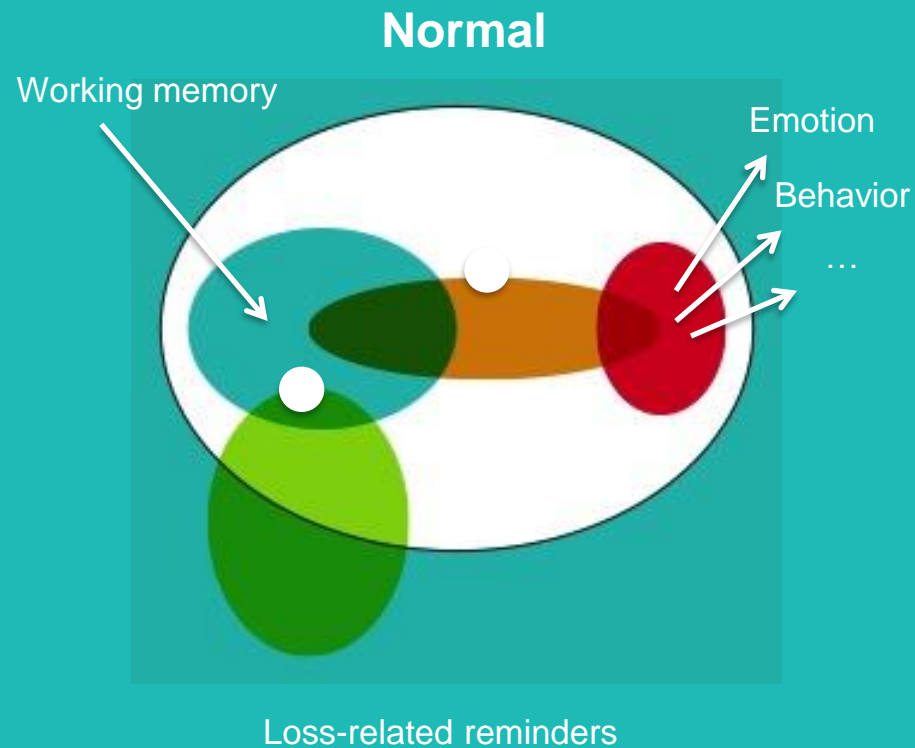
- ~20% of participants developed elevated psychopathology levels

Within this high-risk subgroup:

- Chronic depression and PTSD are often present with comorbid complex grief
- Early grief levels are indicative for severity of grief reactions over time
- No evidence for delayed onset of complex grief

# Complex grief and the brain: Working Memory and Autobiographical Memory

Load on the working memory







# Psychological care

- › First phase: monitoring
- › After about 1 year: offer psychological treatment (in case of PTSD after 6 months) for the people who meet the criteria



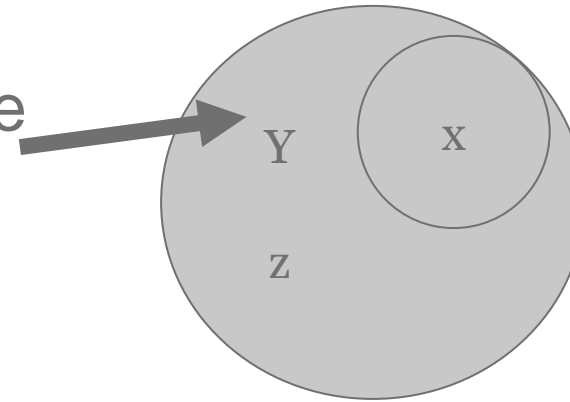
## What to do in the first phase? (< 6 months)

- › Reliable information
- › Psychoeducation (explanation of how processing works)
- › Support, strengthen resilience, encourage contact with fellow sufferers
- › Monitoring (SHN case managers)



# Strengthening resilience

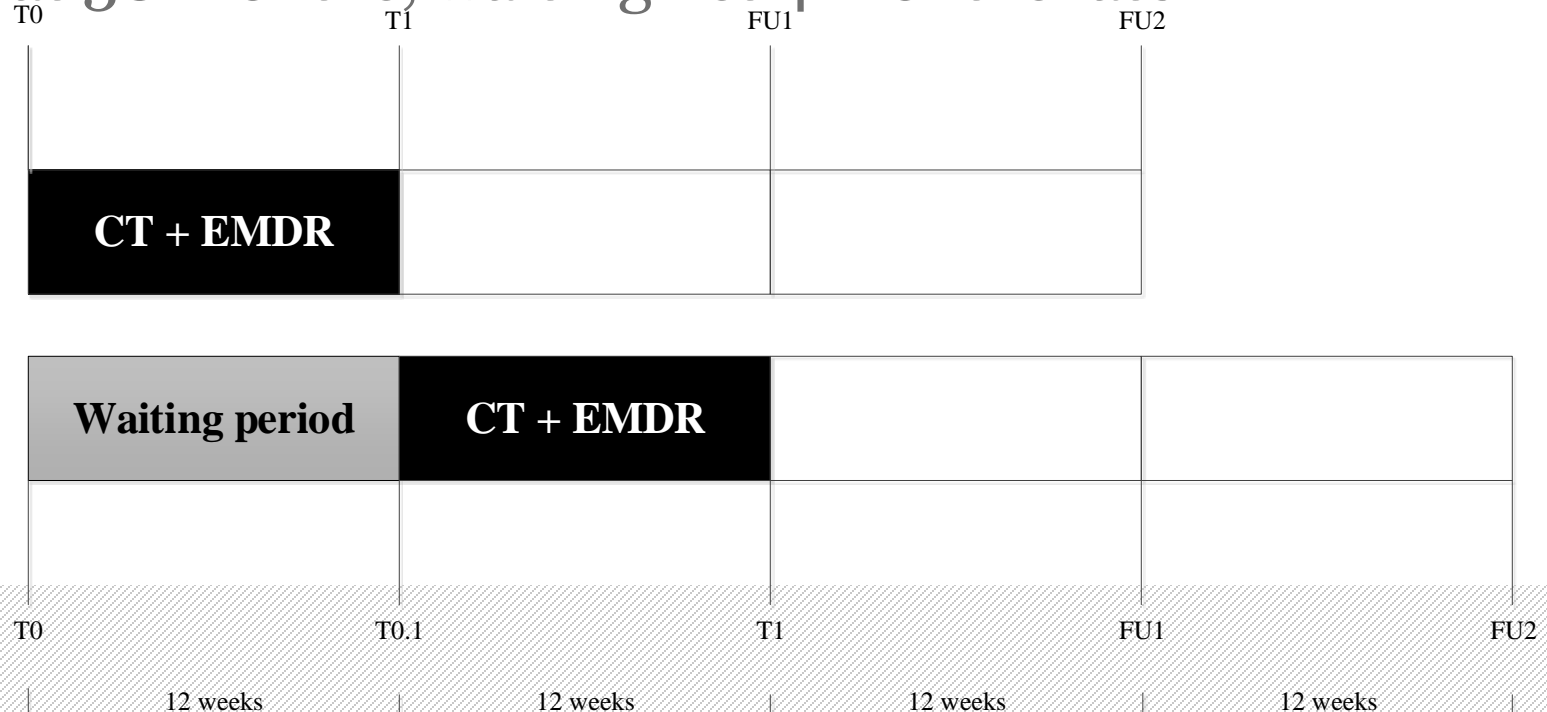
- › Dealing with negative emotions
- › Distinguishing circles of influence
- › Learning from old experiences
- › Develop self-confidence
- › Increase level of frustration tolerance
- › Keep a resilient outlook
- › Close contact to other victims/  
bereaved

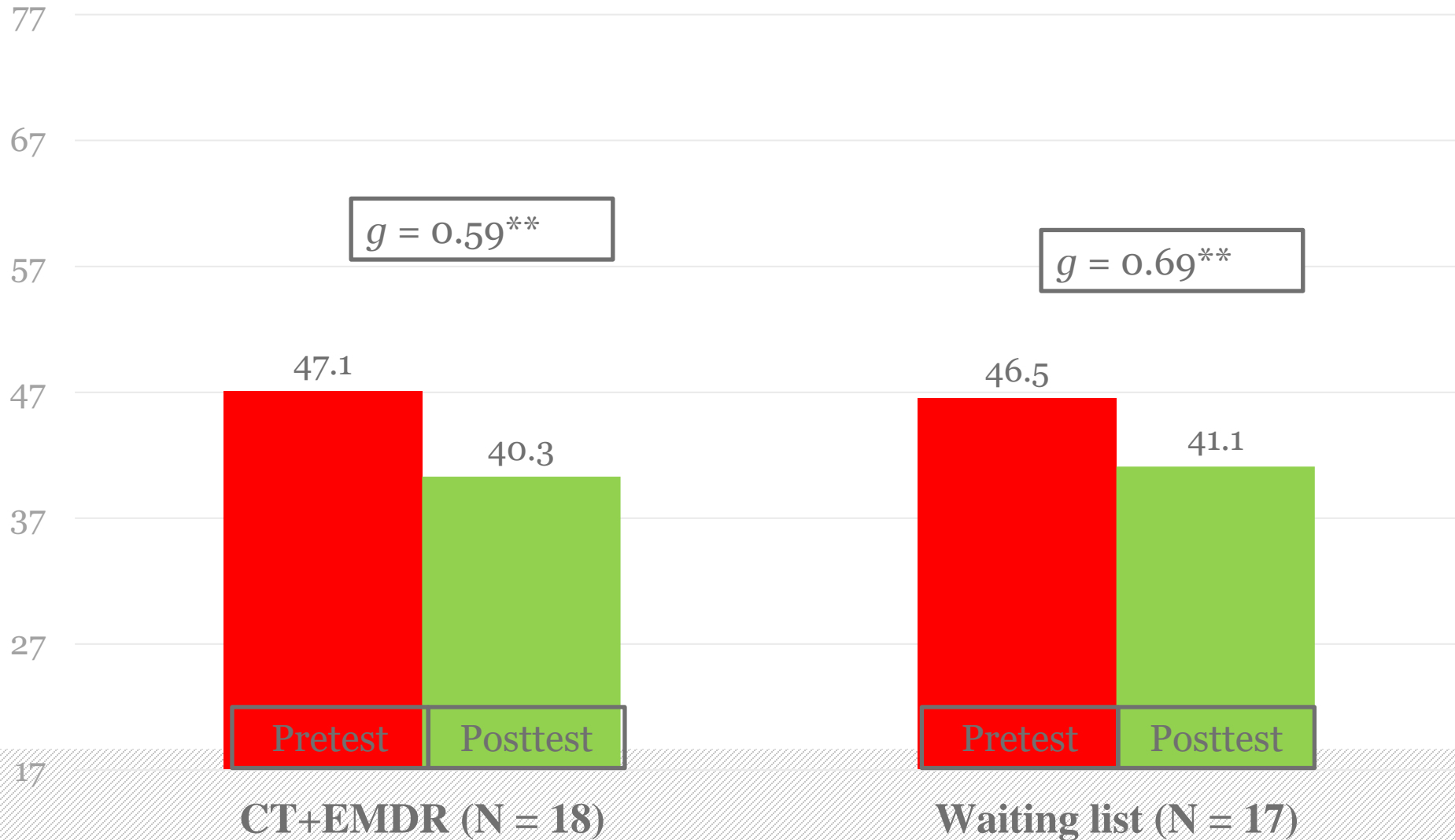




# Intervention in 36 relatives with complex grief

- › 8 sessions of EMDR- CBT,
- › Trained, experienced psychologists
- › Intervention at 30 months, waiting list 4 months later







## Psychological Intervention (summary)

- Cognitive therapy + EMDR showed significant small to medium improvement in complex grief, depression and PTSD levels.
- Compared to the waiting list control condition, the treatment was effective in reducing depression levels and PTSD to a slight degree.
- The sample was too small to make really valid statements.





## Participation in International Court in The Hague (2020-22)





## 6-8 years after MH17 disaster: criminal trial, Victim Impact Statements (VIS)

- › Of the long-term MH17 survivors' study, 123 relatives participated in pre-measurement and 84 in post-measurement
- › VIS 84:24 self; 12 written; 19 thirds and 29 not

Motivations, correlates, and grief-related distress related to  
delivering a statement in court: A longitudinal mixed-method  
study among homicidally bereaved people

L.C.J. Nijborg<sup>1</sup>, M.J.J. Kunst<sup>2</sup>, G.J. Westerhof<sup>1</sup>, A. de Keijser<sup>3</sup>, & L.I.M. Lenferink<sup>1,3,4</sup>

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## Reasons to speak (N=24)

- › Telling emotional impact + acknowledgment (approx. 80%)
- › Deceased-related (representing, honoring) (approx. 25%)
- › Lawsuit-related (approx. 20%)



## Reasons for not speaking (pre-measured N=60)

- › Self-protection (50%)
- › No added value (20%)
- › Public character (20%)
- › Don't want to look back, but forward (10%)



# differences between speakers and non-speakers with regard to complex grief and PTSD

Next of kin who do not make use of the right to speak have fewer complaints PRIOR to the MH17 trial.

This does NOT change after they have exercised the right to speak.



## Conclusion: MH17's right to speak

- Most surviving relatives do not make use of the right to speak (about 1000 direct surviving relatives, about 90 made use of this victim's right)
- Those who made use of this, very much appreciated it (especially the acknowledging attitude of the court).
- This group has more problems with processing than the group that did not make use of the right to speak.
- Exercising the right to speak does not lead to fewer complaints of grief/PTSD





## MH17 - trail experience of bereaved persons

- › Mean score 8 out of 10 about verdict
- › 8,5 about legal proceedings
- › **In general:**
- › **participants in International Court were very positive about the trail in general**



# Important to publish articles and give information to bereaved

## RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Trajectories of grief, depression, and posttraumatic stress in disaster-bereaved people

Lonneke I. M. Lenferink<sup>1,2</sup> | Angela Nickerson<sup>3</sup> | Jos de Keijser<sup>1</sup> |

Geert E. Smid<sup>4,5</sup> | Paul A. Boelen<sup>2,4</sup>



Clinical Psychological Science





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