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THE REALITY OF MIGRANTS: A STUDY OF THE ITALIAN RED CROSS ‘MULTIPLE DIVERSITIES’ PROJECT

The increasing number of foreign citizens in Europe and in Italy has confronted Third Sector bodies and volunteering associations about all those social and health-related issues inherent to the theme of international migration and about the - now widely acknowledge – correlation that exists between the journey and the mental health of who migrates. Despite the fact that in the last years the knowledge of the main aspects characterizing the foreign population has grown, there still is little information on their health condition and on the level of psychological distress suffered.

Who are these people? How do they live their diversity? Do they communicate it? Do they recognize it? Do they tell it?

The lack of a social survey represents just one aspect of a more general condition of invisibility that this target population suffers. The present research arises from the need to further understand

what it means to be migrants in Italy and what it means for migrant people to recognize themselves also in a sexual orientation.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, turn out to be an affective-sexual minority due to their vulnerability concerning the psychological adaptation level and the psychological well-being, because they are more exposed to social stressors with respect to the affective-sexual majority of heterosexual people (Lewis et al., 2012). Several studies demonstrate a significant relationship between the mental health of LGBT people and phenomena such as discrimination, bullism, homophobia, low self-esteem and external pressures pushing them to conform to the context. This shows how these traumatic experiences can lead the same individual to think about exit forms, such as suicidal, or to use maladaptive and dysfunctional behaviours, such as the abu-

se of alcohol and/or drugs, as a way to contrast adversities faced in life (Russel et al., 2016). In a perspective of prevention and promotion of health, it is essential that an adequate and deep attention is given to the variables influencing the psychological distress of people belonging to two minorities, such as the sexual and ethnic/migratory one, co-existing in the same individual. This is where “Multiple Diversity” lies. Given the scarce attention to the psychological distress that migrant people welcomed in reception centres can experience, especially when they belong to a minority as far as their sexual orientation, it is appropriate to look deeper into this point. Particularly, it is essential to analyze how much and in which ways the psychological distress affects LGBT guests, confronting them with the same heterosexual migrant people, received in the same reception centres. The following research aims at evaluating the level of psychological distress connected to sexual orientation, through the analysis of a sample of migrant people living in the reception centres managed on the territory of Lazio

Region from the Rome Branch of the Italian Red Cross, and at analysing the protective factors such as resilience, coping strategies and the potential correlation between resilience and internalized homonegativity of the sample.

From the results obtained, it emerges how migrant homosexual people present a higher degree of psychological distress with respect to heterosexual migrants. Specifically, LGBT migrant people have recorded a higher level of somatization; this was also noted in the study of Mustanski and colleagues (Mustanski, 2012) where the results showed how minoritarian LGBT groups, feeling victims of a marginalizing reality, used to live a high psychological distress level, including symptoms of somatization and anxiety. Furthermore, the research has evidenced how this aspect is related to levels of high psychological distress, as it emerged also in the present work (Williams & Farris, 2011).

Daily experienced traumas, such as bullism, discrimination, verbal and non-verbal aggressions, both at social and environmental level, are a reason of personal closure and difficulties in relating to the external world, which bring LGBT people to show more symptoms of depression and interpersonal sensitivity.

Studies have shown that LGBT migrants waiting for asylum have a higher incidence in number of

sexual violence and abuses suffered and prosecution during their childhood within their family context. Also, the same people are more likely to manifest suicidal conceptions with respect to heterosexual migrants (Hopkinson et al., 2016). These are among the factors that can influence levels of depression and high personal sensitivity, as these kind of experiences tend to condition aspects of humour and mental health, and they are therefore important experiences where to base therapeutic support (Hopkinson et al., 2016).

For victims of the abovementioned experiences, undertaking the coming-out process after arrival in the welcoming country could be a major problem. In fact, the high level of personal sensitivity could bring a “freezing” status with respect to the coming-out process, which requires instead that the affected person is given an appropriate span of time to exit his or her comfort zone, a change needed to share their experience about receiving centres.

The discriminatory beliefs, often associated to cultures that see LGBT people as “ill”, as it has

been pictured by many of the guests interviewed, do not favour integration, and they can become a major cause for the development of long-term mental diseases.

There are few researches proving how being exposed to discriminatory acts can with time bring to developing more serious mental illnesses; for this reason, it becomes important to activate a policy of prevention and information, oriented to the characterization of business cases, with the aim of offering psychological support (Kidd et al., 2016).

Adding up to the potential relationship between resilience and internalized homonegativity of migrant people hosted in Rome Red Cross reception centres in Lazio Region, it emerges how migrant LGBT people are characterized by lower levels of protective factors such as resilience and coping strategies when confronted with stressful situations.

According to the study of Nakamura and colleagues (Nakamura et al., 2017), not only resilience is the ability to overcome adversities, also, it consists in the power to acquire new competences and strengthen relational ties, which

emerged to be problematic for the participants to the research.

Moreover, the results have shown that LGBT migrant people, with respect to heterosexual migrant people, tend to adopt minor coping styles, which are more action-oriented, and are generally preferred to the most damaging ones (hiding, retrieving, distancing).



At the same time, this study provides a starting point to better understand resilience and coping strategies in a secondary-level group of especially vulnerable individuals: migrants living in first reception centres. It is essential to adopt policies and social and psychological practices that promote psychological support interventions in places deputy to reception, so as to promote In the group of homosexual migrants a significant relationship between resilience levels and some of the dimensions of internalized homonegativity. The results indicate that within the group of homosexual people there is a significant negative correlation between resilience levels and the score of the second-level scale of personal homonegativity. This result suggests that migrant LGBT people with inferior levels of resilience tend to have major feelings and negative attitudes with respect to their sexual orientation.

With the term “personal homonegativity” we refer both to negative emotions and negative behaviours that homosexual people can experience with respect to their homosexuality. Another re-

sult of this study is a significant positive association between resilience levels and the dimension of Gay-Lesbian Statement (Homosexual). This result seems to confirm that LGBT migrants are more resilient and tend to have a more positive vision of their sexual orientation, and from the psychological point of view they are more open to emotions and positive attitudes with respect to their homosexuality.

This last construct of Homosexual Statement indicates the extent to which homosexual people feel that their homosexuality is a positive and important part of their person, and that being homosexual is normal and fulfilling. Moreover, this refers to the beliefs and the positive attitudes with respect to homosexuality, being characterized as a sort of internalized “homopositivity” (Mayfield, 2001). Thus, resilience, intended as the number of factors that define the ability to live and positively develop in presence of a distress factor or of adverse circumstances that prospect a strong negative risk (Cyrułnik, 2001). Therefore, this is a fundamental variable when approaching LGBT people - re-

lated issues. Indeed, it is one of the major protective factors with respect to psychological distress suffered by LGBT migrants.

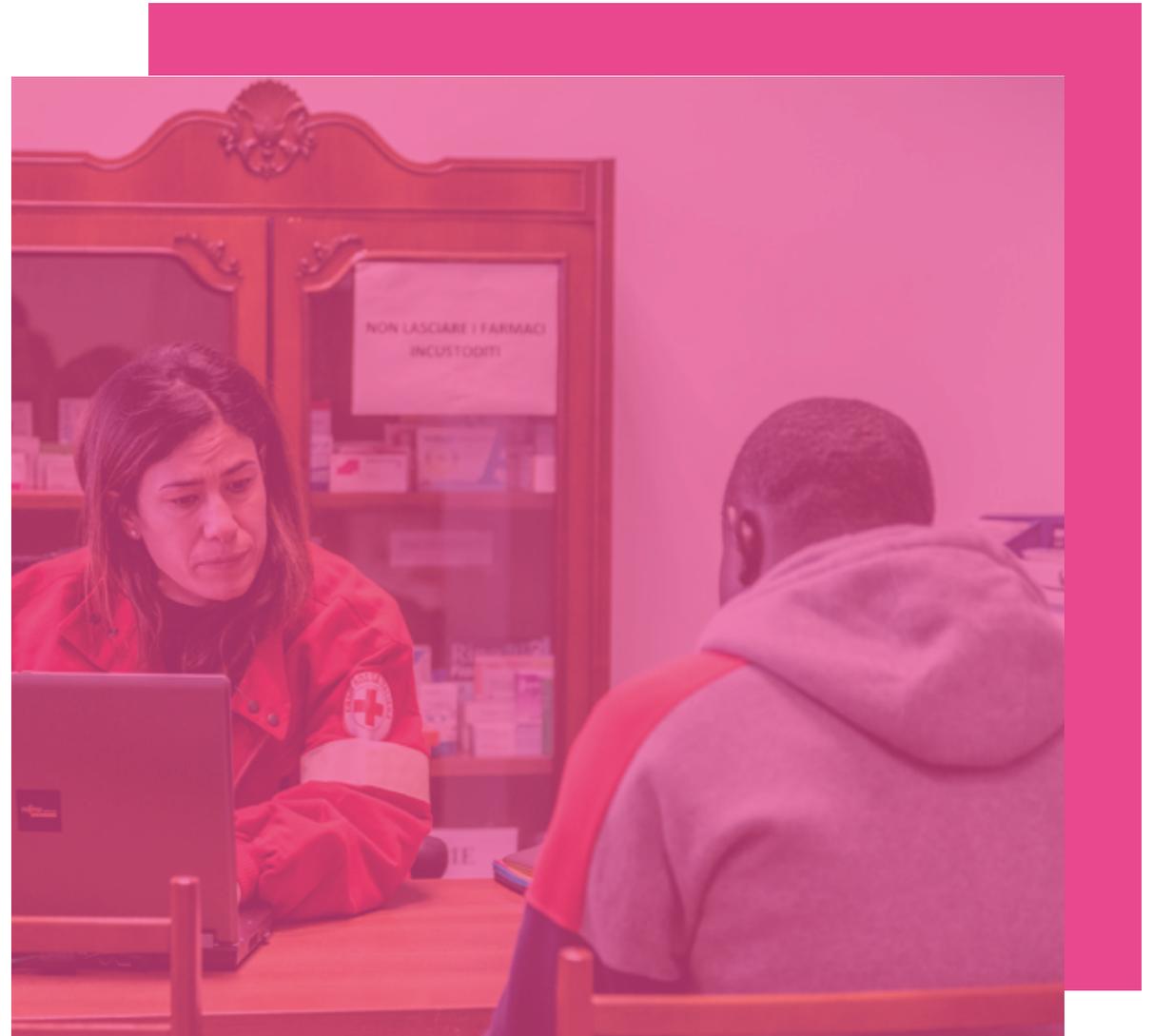
This research is structured into two articles, and unfortunately it has some structural limitations, such as: the scarce number of people who accepted to take part in the research, their attitude and the delicate theme; the limited number of LGBT people who accepted to take part to the research, compared to the number of heterosexuals; not having a support in dedicated scientific researches, especially in Italy; the research being conducted at the time when participants were experiencing political struggles with respect to their asylum requests, who have impaired collaborative attitudes along the study- and thus a 6 months time-span resulted inadequate for this research. Another limit was the use of self-report tests, which can easily entangle the falsification of answers, tied to social desirability, self-esteem, existing stereotypes, and finally a struggle in comprehending and interpreting stimula.

At the same time there are some

strong points that can be recognized from the study, such as the fact that it is a pilot study for future researches in this field, so as to provide a better support to LGBT people, in cities far from their origin countries.

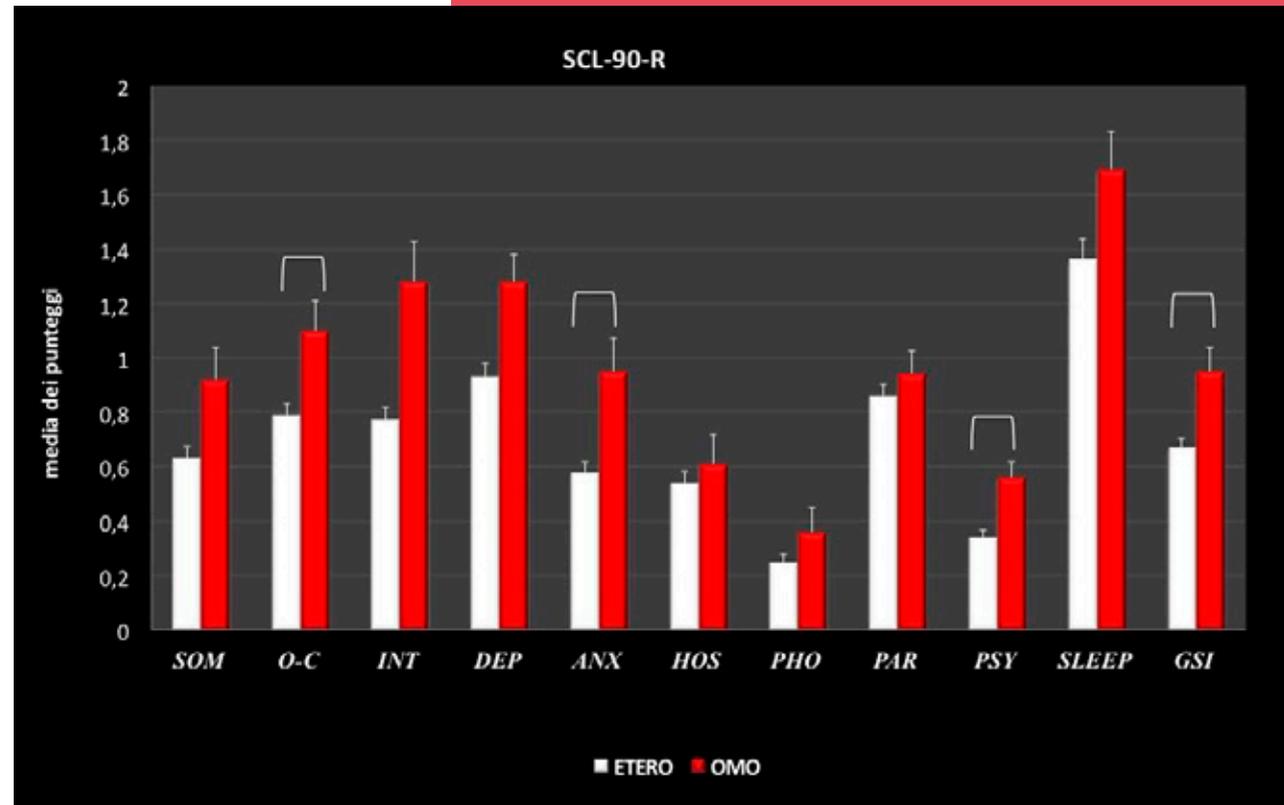
Concluding, it is appropriate to underline that the results of this study suggest that belonging to two minorities, such as ethnic and sexual minority, is generally associated to higher levels of psychological distress, and it also has a reception model with structured pathways and assistance interventions that deal with specific needs connected to mental health for this particularly vulnerable component of the population.

the psycho-physical well-being of LGBT migrant people.



A confrontation of average scores in the two sub-samples (HETERO and HOMO) through the T-Student test for each of the dimension of SCL-90-R scale.

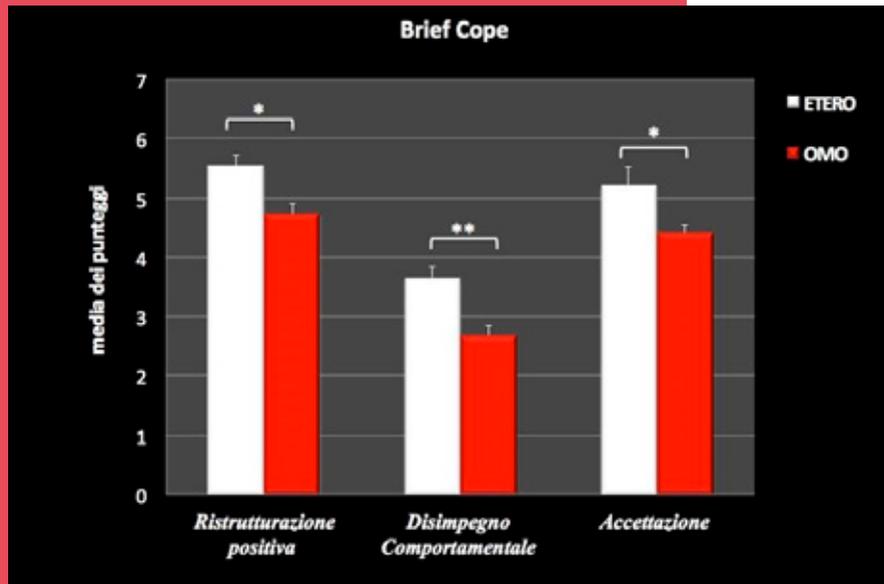
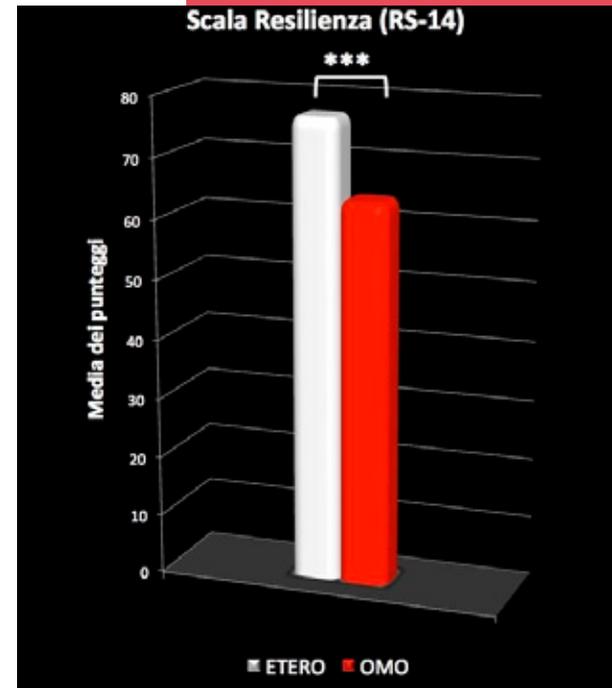
DIAGRAMS



Legend: Somatization (SOM), Obsessive-Compulsive (O-C), Interpersonal sensitivity (INT), Depression (DEP), Anxiety (ANX), Hostility (HOS), Phobic anxiety (PHOB), Paranoia conception (PAR), Psychoticism (PSY), Sleep disturb (SLEEP), General Symptomatic Index (GSI); Significance levels * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.0001$

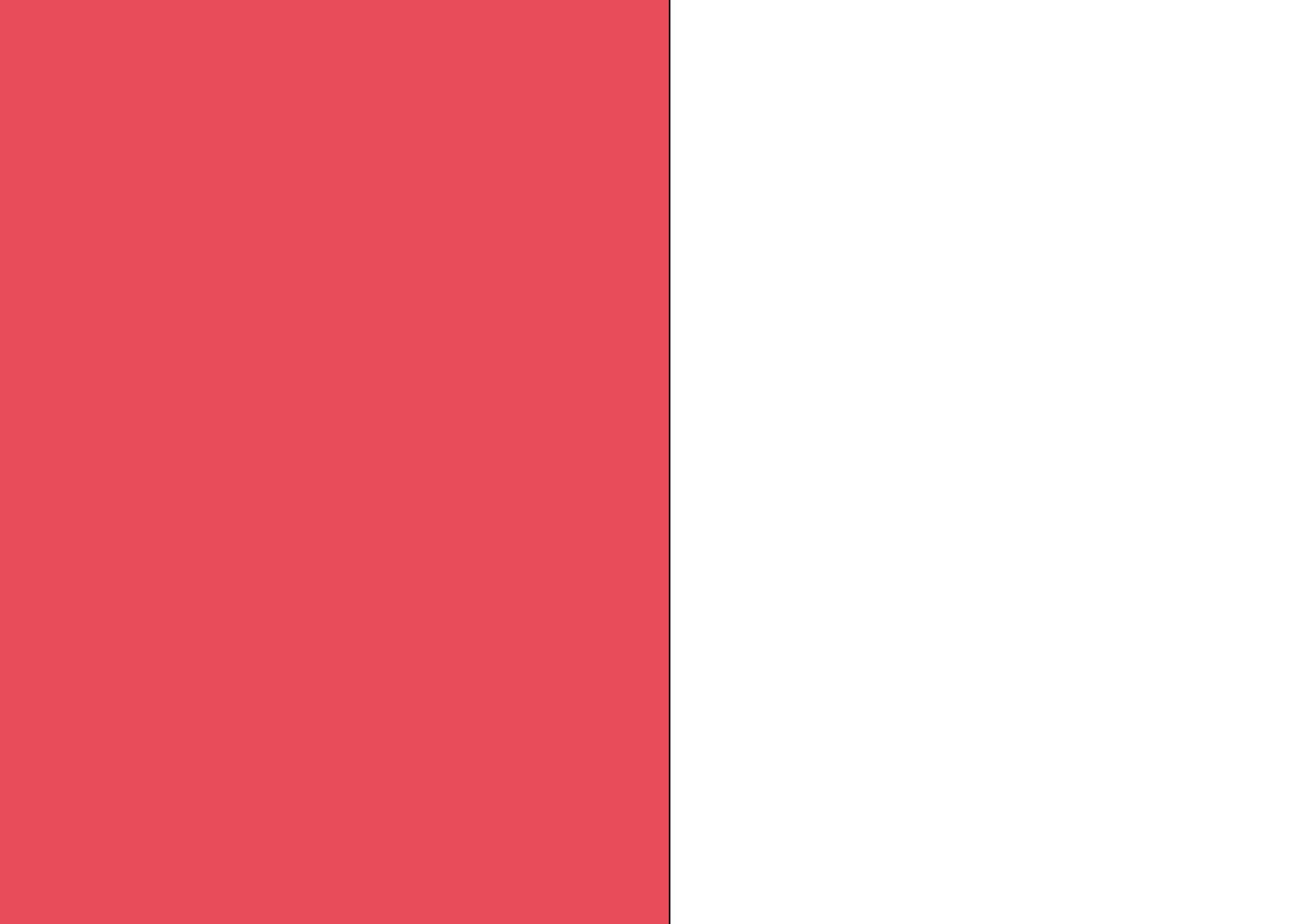
Confrontation among the averages of Resilience scale (RS-14) scores between the two samples (HETERO and HOMO).

Legend: Significance levels ***= $p < 0.001$



Confrontation between the two samples of the average of scores for the two samples (HETERO and HOMO), for each dimension of Brief Cope, through T-Student test.

Legend: Significance levels *= $p < 0.01$;
**= $p < 0.001$





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