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The Metaphorical Conceptualization of Depression in Arabic Blogs Written by Patients with Depressive Disorder

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the conceptual metaphors of depression in a corpus of 100 blogs written in Arabic by people suffering from major depressive disorder by adopting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Metaphor Identification Procedure was used to identify metaphorical expressions, and then the five-step procedure proposed by Steen was employed to extract the conceptual metaphors. The results revealed three main categories of metaphors: metaphors of depression, metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context, and metaphors of medicine and professional treatment. The study concluded that blogging as a genre provides individuals with the opportunity to give more truthful descriptions of their illness, which enables them to present a more thorough picture of their lives with depressive disorder.

Keywords: Blogging; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Depressive Disorder; Genre; Metaphorical Expressions

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1. Introduction

Depressive disorder (also known as depression) is a common mental disorder that involves a depressed mood or loss of interest in activities over a long period of time. The major symptoms are lack of concentration, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, hopelessness, disrupted sleep, changes in appetite or weight, thoughts about dying, etc. Around 280 million people in the world suffer from depression. More than 700,000 people die because of committing suicide every year.

Depression as a psychological concept can be described by metaphorical expressions since our psychological states are considered abstract notions, and thus, it can be understood by conceptual metaphors^[1]. Conceptual metaphor is defined as “understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete)”^[2]. For instance, the conceptual metaphor argument is war is noticeable in our everyday language, and this is reflected by a number of linguistic expressions. In the following sentences: “*Your claims are indefensible,*” “*He attacked every weak point in my argument,*” and “*I’ve never won an argument with him,*” we do not only describe arguments in terms of war, but we also win or lose arguments and we consider the person who argues against us an adversary. Thus, we attack his claims, and we defend ours. Accordingly, in Argument is war conceptual metaphor, argument functions as a target domain, while war acts as a source domain^[3].

A growing body of research has examined the metaphors used to depict a variety of medical conditions and pandemics, such as COVID-19, Cancer, and Hypertension^[4-6]. Besides, there is a considerable amount of literature that has investigated the metaphors employed to conceptualize a range of mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and depression^[7-9].

A blog is defined as “an Internet website traditionally containing personal commentary in descending chronological order with hyperlinks to other websites”^[10]. Blogging started in the late 1990s as a way for individuals to publish their online personal diaries^[11]. Blogs, which are intriguing mediums of communication and personal expression, have been considered as rich sources of data for research^[12]. To the best of the researchers’ knowledge, not a single study has investigated the use of metaphors to depict depression or any mental illnesses in Arabic in general and in the genre of blogs in particular. Hence, the current study aims to bridge this

gap in the literature by examining the conceptual metaphors employed to describe depression in Arabic online blogs written by patients suffering from depression. In particular, the current study aims to seek answers to the following research questions:

(1) What are the metaphors used to describe depression in Arabic Blogs written by patients with depressive disorders?

(2) How do these metaphors reflect how depression is experienced by patients with depressive disorders?

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical framework and empirical studies. Section 3 outlines the methodology, including corpus selection and metaphor identification. Section 4 presents the results, analyzing depression metaphors in social contexts. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to existing research, and Section 6 concludes with key insights and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which was originally proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, viewed metaphor in a way that is distinctly different from the way in which traditional approaches represent metaphor^[3]. Thus, instead of considering metaphor a stylistic and artistic ornament to the literal language, metaphor is perceived as something essential to human thought and reasoning^[3]. Put another way, the main tenet of this theory is that “metaphors are conceptual in nature, that is, that they reside in the conceptual system, and not just in language”^[13]. Metaphors rely on embodied human experiences^[14]. Since human beings grasp abstract notions through their bodies and physical experience, embodied experience is expressed metaphorically^[13]. For example, affection is perceived metaphorically as warmth because of the association that is established between the passionate embrace of our parents and the bodily warmth that we felt when we were hugged by them since childhood. This creates the conceptual metaphor that AFFECTION IS WARMTH. Thus, thinking and talking about “affection in terms of warmth arises naturally from our embodied experience.” For instance, we describe the relationship that we have with someone as warm, e.g., “We have a warm relationship”^[13].

There is a systematic set of correspondences between the two domains of experience, i.e., the source and target domain in conceptual metaphor. Another term that is commonly used in the literature for “correspondence” is “mapping.” The following conceptual metaphor ANGER IS FIRE is reflected in the following metaphorical expressions: “That *kindled* my ire.” “Those were *inflammatory* remarks.” “*Smoke* was coming out of his ears”. “She was *burning* with anger”. The following set of correspondences, or mappings, can be proposed: the cause of fire is mapped into the cause of anger; the thing on fire corresponds to the angry person; the fire is mapped into the anger^[2].

In the current study, the bottom-up approach is adopted in which linguistics metaphorical expressions are considered the basis for formulating hypotheses about conceptual cross-domain mappings^[15]. Metaphorical expressions are identified by adopting Metaphor Identification Procedures (MIP). Steen et al. proposed a modified version of MIP, which is called MIPVU. MIPVU is used to identify directly expressed metaphors that involve the use of similes and comparisons, such as he’s like a favorite old coat, whereas MIP, which is adopted in the present study, is concerned with the indirectly expressed metaphors^[16]. After identifying the metaphorical expressions, the five-step procedure proposed by Steen is adopted to identify the underlying conceptual metaphors from the metaphorical expressions identified by MIP in the first stage^[17].

CMT was revised by Kövecses, who proposed the Extended CMT (ECMT)^[18]. First of all, the ECMT includes a strong contextual component and is not just seen as a cognitive explanation of metaphor. In particular, the use of metaphors in discourse is influenced by a number of contextual factors, viz., situational context, discourse context, bodily context, and conceptual-cognitive context. Second, ECMT demonstrates that each conceptual metaphor exists on four hierarchical levels of schematicity, including image schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces, rather than just one level, such as domains or frames. For example, THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS conceptual metaphor is based on several image schemas OBJECT, CONTAINER, PART-WHOLE, and VERTICALITY. The building domain is constituted by several schematic concepts. The building is a structured object that is manmade and made of physical matter. It is also an enclosed space that has a particular shape, color, and function.

The building domain consists of a number of frames, namely, the building, (physical) support, parts of the building, and the function of the building. At the mental spaces level, the following conceptualization occurs: “John built himself a strong house.” The metaphorical connection is illustrated in phrases such as MARY BUILDING A CAREER IS MARY BUILDING A HOUSE AND JOHN’S LIFE WITHOUT A FOUNDATION IS JOHN’S HOUSE WITHOUT A FOUNDATION^[19].

2.2. Empirical Studies

Several studies have investigated the metaphorical conceptualization of depression in different genres, such as graphic memoirs, therapy sessions, interviews with clinical psychologists, radio broadcasts, poetry, interviews with patients diagnosed with depression, blogs, animation films, etc. Barcelona Sánchez^[20] was the first researcher to carry out a study on the metaphors used to conceptualize depression in English. This study relies on the researcher’s own examples of metaphors of depression without referring to any genuine data or documented sources. The researcher claimed that the main metaphors of depression in English are HAPPINESS IS UP/UNHAPPINESS IS DOWN, AND HAPPINESS IS LIGHT/UNHAPPINESS IS DARKNESS. Besides, Barcelona argued that depression is conceptualized in terms of enemy, burden, bounded space, FORCE, NUISANCE, and LIVING ORGANISM. Finally, the person experiencing depression is conceptualized as a container of emotions, whereas depression is depicted metaphorically as a substance in that container.

McMullen and Conway examined the language produced by 21 persons diagnosed with depression to describe their own experience of depression during therapy sessions^[21]. The study shows that the most common metaphor is DEPRESSION IS DESCENT metaphors, accounting for 90 % of metaphors, whereas the remaining metaphors are DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS, DEPRESSION IS WEIGHT AND DEPRESSION IS CAPTOR.

Charteris-Black compares the types of English metaphors used by men and women who experienced depression to talk about depression through conducting 38 interviews^[22]. The results show there is no major difference between men and women in their use of metaphors to describe depression, especially in relation to the following metaphors, namely, “descent,” “weight and pressure,” and “darkness and light” metaphors. A large number of in-

stances of containment and constraint metaphors have also been found, which were considered limited in the previous research. The researcher concluded that “therapists should encourage clients to use diverse metaphors to convey the intensity of their emotions even if the feelings they convey are negative ones”^[22].

Reali et al. examined a corpus of Spanish press and fiction and nonfiction books to identify the metaphors of depression^[23]. The analysis depended on the automatic pre-selection of potential metaphorical expressions. The study found that the most dominant conceptual metaphors are DEPRESSION IS AN OPPONENT such as a beast or monster, and DEPRESSION IS A PLACE in space that is described as dark, deep, and bounded.

Forceville and Paling analyzed the metaphors used to represent depression visually in wordless, animated movies^[24]. The two most prominent metaphors are DEPRESSION IS A DARK MONSTER and DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE. Both mainly depend on the following conceptual metaphors: EMOTIONAL STATE IS A LOCATION, and EMOTIONAL STATE IS AN OBJECT METAPHOR. The study revealed that animated movies, which reflect meaning visually, sonically, and musically, provide a significant medium for understanding depression.

Tonon examined four online forums-related mental illnesses to reveal how individuals metaphorically express their depressive states^[25]. The researcher adopted both a linguistic theory, i.e., CMT, and a psychological theory, i.e., Self-determination Theory. The most frequently used metaphors are DEPRESSION IS A DOWNWARD MOVEMENT, DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS, DEPRESSION IS A CONFLICT, DEPRESSION IS A BOUNDED SPACE, DEPRESSION IS A DISINTEGRATION OF THE SELF, DEPRESSION IS AN OPPRESSIVE FORCE, AND DEPRESSION IS EMPTINESS. The study concluded that metaphors “reveal aspects of the mind that otherwise could not be examined empirically”^[25].

Coll-Florit et al. explored the conceptual metaphors used to represent depression in 23 blogs written in Catalan by people suffering from major depressive disorder^[26]. The study revealed that the majority of metaphors detected in this study are also found in previous studies, whereas the metaphors that are untested in previous literature are ascribed to several related to medical, social, communicative,

and other factors. The researchers concluded that blogs as a textual genre enable patients with depression to express themselves freely, and this reveals new metaphors associated with contextual factors of life with depression.

Raiisi and Riyassi have investigated the metaphors for depression in Persian from the perspective of clinical psychologists^[9]. Thirty clinical psychologists were interviewed in order to provide descriptions that show how depressed patients describe depression. The study found that there are eight main source domains used to depict depression such as human, color, path, taste, direction, place, container, and object. This study concluded that “according to the embodiment rule and like other abstract concepts, it seems that depression can be understood and conceptualized by cognitive metaphors”^[9].

While previous studies have explored metaphors of depression in various genres, research on Arabic digital discourse remains limited. Most studies focus on English and rely on researcher-generated examples rather than authentic data. This study fills the gap by analyzing Arabic blogs to uncover culture-specific and universal metaphors of depression.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus Selection and Compilation

The blogs were sourced from publicly accessible platforms where individuals explicitly identified as having been diagnosed with depression. Selection criteria prioritized narrative-rich content, excluding general discussions on mental health or news articles, to ensure a focus on personal experiences.

The corpus includes 100 blogs written by individuals who described themselves as being diagnosed with depression. The language of the blogs is Arabic. The resulting corpus has a total of 13,641 words. Regarding ethical issues, the researchers preserved the anonymity of the subjects and followed the criteria of Semino et al.: “There is some consensus that anything a person posts to a forum that is open to public view on the web can be used as research material without seeking informed consent from the individual contributor, as long as anonymity is fully preserved”^[27].

3.2. Identification Procedure of Metaphors

The bottom-up approach is adopted in the current study to derive conceptual metaphors from metaphorical expressions. First, the researchers used the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) devised by the Pragglejaz Group to identify the metaphorical expressions used in the corpus^[28]. MIP involves the following stages:

- (1) Read the entire text—discourse to establish a general understanding of its meaning.
- (2) Determine the lexical units in the text—discourse
 - (a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.
 - (b) For each lexical unit, determine whether it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be—more concrete [what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste], related to bodily action, more precise (as opposed to vague), and historically older. Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.
 - (c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current—contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.
- (3) If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

Secondly, the five-step procedure proposed by Steen was adopted to derive the conceptual metaphors from the metaphorical expressions^[17]. The steps are outlined as follows:

- (a) Find the metaphorical focus.
- (b) Find the metaphorical proposition.
- (c) Find the metaphorical comparison.
- (d) Find the metaphorical analogy.
- (e) Find the metaphorical mapping.

Example:

أحاول وحيدة أن أحارب الإكتئاب

I try to fight depression alone.

Following the approach proposed by Steen, the first step is to use MIP to identify metaphorical words^[17]. In the

example provided, the word *أحارب* “fight” is used metaphorically since it has a contextual meaning that is different from its basic meaning, which refers to taking part in a war or battle. Metaphorical expressions, along with the words that express the focus or the source domain, are identified. In step 2, the researchers transformed the metaphorical expression into a conceptual metaphor, using a series of propositions, i.e., depression, fight. In step 3, the researchers transformed the single proposition accompanied by concepts from two different domains, which were arrived at in step 2, $SIM \exists F \exists a [F (depression)]t [fight(a)]s$, into an open comparison between two unfinished propositions, each relating to a different source domain. That is, step 3 states that for some state F in the target domain (depression) and some entity a in the source domain (enemy), there is some similarity. Using the terms source and target domains suggests that the similarity has to be projected from fighting an enemy to trying to recover from depression. In step 4, the researchers transformed the open comparison of step 3 into a closed comparison that has the formal structure of an analogy and provided an interpretation of the open values in step 3^[17]. Finally, in step 5, the researchers transformed the analogical structure, which was derived in step 4, into a mapping structure between two conceptual domains, namely, depression and fighting, by establishing a link between fighting an enemy and trying to recover from depression. Thus, the conceptual metaphor would be DEPRESSION IS AN ENEMY.

4. Results

There are 302 metaphorical expressions that were found in the corpus corresponding to three categories related to mental health: (i) metaphors of depression, (ii) metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context, and (iii) metaphors of medicine and professional treatment. **Table 1** shows 72.46% of the metaphorical expressions are metaphors of depression, which are expressed through three target domains: life of depressed patients, disorder, and depressed patients.

Metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context, which account for 17.93% of the metaphorical expressions detected in the corpus, include the following three target domains: PREJUDICE, COMMUNICATION/LACK OF COMMUNICATION, and PEOPLE OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXT (family

Table 1. The number and percentage of metaphor expressions identified in the corpus.

Metaphors	Frequency of Metaphorical Expressions	Percentage
metaphor of depression	250	72.46
metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context	60	17.39
metaphors of medicine and professional treatment.	35	10.14
Total	345	

and friends). Finally, metaphors of medicine which represent 10.14% of the metaphorical expressions found in the corpus include three target domains: DOCTOR, MEDICAL CONSULTATION and TREATMENT.

The metaphors of depression are the most frequent in the corpus. It is worth noting that the existence of metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context reveals the importance of communication and the social environment in relation to depressed patients. Metaphors of depression, metaphors of interpersonal communication and social con-

text and metaphors of medicine will be presented separately and discussed in the following subsections.

4.1. Metaphor of Depression

Metaphors of depression include target domains not only related to the conceptualization of the disorder but also related to the people suffering from depression and their lives with depression. **Table 2** shows the frequency and percentage of the target domains of metaphors of depression.

Table 2. The frequency and percentage of the target domains of metaphors of depression.

Target Domains	Frequency of Metaphorical Expressions	Percentage
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION	78	31.2
DISORDER	100	40
DEPRESSED PATIENTS	72	28.8
Total	250	

4.1.1. Metaphors of Life with Depression

Life with depression is mainly conceptualized through seven main source domains, namely, JOURNEY, WAR, LIGHT, FOOD, FOREST, DESERT, and SPORT (examples 1–13, **Table 3**). The metaphors of JOURNEY and WAR for conceptualizing life with depression were already found in the work of Coll-Florit et al.^[26]. Journey metaphors are used to conceptualize life with depression because, while traveling, a person moves in a given direction to reach a certain destination, and while doing so, they may come across obstacles. In a similar vein, a depressed patient has a certain destination, i.e., recovery from depression that they move towards and may encounter challenges and roadblocks along the way. In particular, life with depression is metaphorically conceptualized as a journey with a dead end in which a depressed person does not know where to go, and thus he/she is looking for a road map to find their destination as illustrated in examples 1–4.

Regarding the source domain war, life with depres-

sion is represented as a fierce battle in which people around are described as opponents to the depressed people who are supposed not to surrender as shown in examples 5–7. Depression is metaphorically construed in terms of darkness as seen in example 8. In example 9, life with depression is represented as a desert since desert has a negative connotation of death and non-existence. Additionally, depression is conceptualized as a wild forest in which people are portrayed as fierce animals attacking the depressed, as in example 10. Life of depressed people is further metaphorically described as a race and a wrestling ring, where individuals compete to win and defeat opponents, as illustrated in examples 11 and 12, respectively. Finally, example 13 portrays life with depression as bitter-tasting food.

4.1.2. Metaphors of the Disorder

This section is devoted to presenting the findings of the metaphors that have the disorder as their target domain. **Table 4** provides examples 14–43 of these metaphors. The most

Table 3. Examples of conceptual metaphors depicting life with depression.

Conceptual Metaphor	NO.	Example
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS A JOURNEY	1	رحلة حياتي مليئة بالألم و الأحران و العذاب My life's journey is full of pain, sorrow and torment
	2	لا أعلم فيما إذا كنت قد وصلت إلى نهاية طريق مسدود I don't know if I've reached a dead end
	3	لا أعلم في أي اتجاه علي أن أسير ،و لكن يجب علي أن أسير قدما 'I don't know which way to go , but I have to go forward '
	4	أبحث عن خارطة الطريق في هذا الظلام الدامس ، فلعلها توصلني إلى وجهتي بأمان بدون أن أهرم الدموع وأتجرع الاحزان I am looking for the road map in this complete darkness, so that it may lead me to my destination safely without shedding tears and swallowing sorrows.
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS WAR	5	كان مصير جميع معاركي الطاحنة في هذه الحياة الفشل All my fierce battles in this life have been doomed to failure
	6	برغم كل العذاب الذي أعانيه في حياتي إلا أنني لن أستسلم Despite all the suffering I suffer in my life, I will not give up.
	7	أشعر ان الجميع في هذه الحياة يحاربني بدون رحمة أو شفقة I feel that everyone in this life fight s me without mercy or pity
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS	8	بقيت حياتي مظلمة طيلة الفترة الماضية My life has been dark for the past period
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS A DESERT	9	ما هذه الحياة إلا صحراء قاحلة نركض فيها جميعا لعلنا نجد شربة ماء تروي ظمأنا This life is nothing but a barren desert in which we all run, hoping to find a drink of water that quenches our thirst
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS A FOREST	10	حياتي عبارة عن غابة موحشة يحاول فيها الجميع ان يفترسني My life is a wild forest where everyone is trying to prey on me
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS A RACE	11	أرى حياتي عبارة عن سباق من المستحيل الفوز به I see my life as a race that is impossible to win
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS A WRESTLING RING	12	أصبحت الحياة حلبة مصارعة وكل شخص يهاجم ويقا تل لهزيمة الآخر Life has become a wrestling ring and everyone attacks and fights to defeat the other
LIFE WITH DEPRESSION IS BITTER FOOD	13	أصبح طعم الحياة مرا منذ ان أصبت بالإكتئاب The taste of life has become bitter since I became depressed

pervasive metaphor, attested in this category, is depression is a living organism. This aligns with the view of Barcelona Sánchez, who maintained that the most common source domain to conceptualize depression is LIVING ORGANISM^[20]. In the current study, depression is metaphorically depicted as a human being who accompanies a depressed patient where they go and whatever they do as in (14). This lends support to Raiisi and Riyassi who stated that depression is metaphorically described as a human being^[9]. In (15), depression

is construed as a fierce animal that devours the depressed person hungrily. Depression is also represented as a ghost that prevents a depressed patient from moving forward as in (16). In addition, it is described as a deadly beast that kills and a devil that has a negative demonic energy as in (17) and (18), respectively. This is in accordance with the work by Barcelona Sánchez who posited that depression is metaphorically represented as a ghost, a monster, and an evil being^[20].

Table 4. Examples of conceptual metaphors depicting depression as a disorder.

Conceptual Metaphor	NO.	Example
DEPRESSION IS A HUMAN BEING	14	يجلس الاكتئاب إلى مائدتك كل يوم، يتناول معك القهوة، وينام في سريرك Depression sits at your table every day, drinks coffee with you, and sleeps in your bed
DEPRESSION IS A FIERCE ANIMAL	15	عندها تلتهمك أنياب الاكتئاب الشرسة Then the fierce fangs of depression will devour you
DREPRESSION IS Supernatural creatures	16	معه ذلك الشبح الذي يقف في وجهي مانعني من تخطي كل ذلك ومن تحقيق كل ما نويته ليلة البارحة With him, that ghost standing in my face, preventing me from going through all of that and achieving all that I set out to do last night
	17	الاكتئاب الحاد هو ذلك الوحش القاتل Severe depression is that deadly beast
DEPRESSION IS A DEVIL	18	الاكتئاب هو طاقة شيطانية سلبية Depression is negative demonic energy
DEPRESSION IS WIND	19	لقد وقف في وجهي رياح عاتية تدفع بي إلى الوراء I was faced with a strong wind that pushed me backwards
DEPRESSION IS A HURRICANE	20	تخيل أن يحدث ما يشبه إعصارا من الاكتئاب يضرب في جميع أرجاء عقلك Imagine a hurricane of depression swirling through your mind
DEPRESSION IS A SEA	21	أغرق في بحر من الاكتئاب العميق I sank into a sea of deep depression
	22	موجة الاكتئاب هذه بدأت منذ عامين تقريبا This wave of depression started about two years ago
DEPRESSION IS A WELL	23	أتمنى الخروج من بئر الاكتئاب الذي يمتد عمقه إلى أميال I hope to get out of the well of depression that extends miles deep
DEPRESSION IS AUTUMN	24	هو الخريف الذي جعل أوراقي تتساقط واحدة خلف الأخرى It is autumn that made my leaves fall one after the other
DEPRESSION IS WAR	25	الاكتئاب معركة يتوجب عليك عدم الاستسلام فيها Depression is a battle in which you must not give up
DEPRESSION IS AN ENEMY	26	أشعر اليوم أنني أخوض معركة جديدة مع عدو يسمى الاكتئاب Today I feel like I'm fighting a new battle with an enemy called depression
	27	هزمت الاكتئاب وتمكنت من تغيير حياتي بشكل كامل I defeated depression and completely changed my life
DEPRESSION IS CANCER	28	الاكتئاب سرطان الروح الذي يدمر حياتنا Depression is a cancer of the soul that destroys our lives
DEPRESSION IS PARALYSIS	29	كنت أشعر بأن شللاً قد أصاب جسدي I felt paralyzed in my body
recovery from depression is ability to move	30	لغني أعود قادرة على المسير قدما في حياتي تعطلت كلياً I might be able to move forward with my life completely disrupted
DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS	31	وأشعر أن الظلام يسحبني ببطء نحو مزيد من الحزن والعذاب And I feel that the darkness is slowly pulling me towards more sadness and torment
RECOVERY FROM DEPRESSION IS LIGHT	32	بدأت عندها أرى النور بعد ظلام دامس خيم على حياتي Then I began to see the light after the complete darkness that had enveloped my life
DEPRESSION IS A DARK TUNNEL	33	أبحث شعاع من النور في نهاية نفق مظلم Looking for a ray of light at the end of a dark tunnel
DEPRESSION IS A BLACK FABRIC	34	ستارة سوداء سميكة تتسدل على عيون فتاة مرافقة، لتخجب الحياة عنها تماماً A thick black curtain falls over the eyes of a teenage girl, completely blocking life from her

Table 4. Cont.

DEPRESSION IS AN OPPRESSIVE FORCE	35	He was pushing me hard into the abyss	كان الاكتئاب يدفعني بقوة نحو الهاوية
DEPRESSION IS A BOUNDED SPACE	36	I see myself as if I am in a closed room all the time	أرى نفسي وكأنني في غرفة مغلقة طوال الوقت
DEPRESSION IS A DOWNWARD MOVEMENT	37	I feel like I'm going downhill	أشعر بأنني اتجه بقوة نحو الأسفل
DEPRESSION IS A PATH	38	I found depression the only way that was placed in front of me and I have to walk in search of salvation	وجدت الاكتئاب الطريق الوحيد الذي وضع أمامي و علي أن أسير باحثاً عن النجاة
DEPRESSION IS DROWNING	39	Drowning alone and knowing that I am powerless to save myself	أغرق وحيدة وأعلم أنني عاجزة عن إنقاذ نفسي
DEPRESSION IS ISOLATION/DISCONNECTION	40	I live isolated from the world that surrounds me	أعيش بمعزل عن العالم الذي يحيط بي
DEPRESSION IS BEING LOST	41	It is that you suffer the feeling of being lost as if you have lost inches of direction	هو أن تكابد شعور الضياع وكأنك فقدت بوصة الاتجاه
DEPRESSION IS A WEIGHT	42	Depression became a heavy weight on my back	أصبح الاكتئاب حملاً ثقيلاً على ظهري
DEPRESSION IS IMBALANCE	43	I suffer from an internal imbalance	أعاني من عدم توازن داخلي

The second most frequent source domain employed to conceptualize depression is nature, where it is described as a devastating natural phenomenon that negatively negative influences a patient's life, leading to suicidal feelings, social isolation, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of productivity, frustration, tearfulness, emptiness or hopelessness and physical pain. In particular, depression is metaphorically represented as **strong wind** that pushed a depressed person backwards as in (19), as a **hurricane** that swirls through the depressed patient's mind as in (20), as a deep sea and a wave that hits the patient as in (21) and (22), and as a well into which the person sinks as in (23). In addition, depression is conceptualized as autumn in which the leaves fall off the trees as in (24). Autumn has a negative connotation of deterioration, decline, decay and death. Accordingly, depicting depression as autumn indicates that it is deteriorating since depressed people experience a lot of sadness and lack of energy, and they lose pleasure and interest in normal activities. This lends support to the view of Tonon who maintained that depression is metaphorically represented as bad weather^[25].

The metaphor of war in (25) is employed to depict depression as a battle in which a depressed person should not surrender. In the same vein, depression is described as an enemy that should be defeated bravely as in (26) and (27), respectively. The use of war source domain to depict depression is found in a number of research studies, such as those by Reali et al., Tonon, and Barcelona Sánchez, who argue that depression is metaphorically represented as an enemy in a battlefield^[20, 23, 25].

On the other hand, disease source domain is utilized to depict depression. In particular, depression is portrayed as cancer, which attacks the human body and soul, and paralysis, which makes the person unable to carry out their daily activities, as in (28) and (29), respectively. Thus, recovery from depression is metaphorically conceptualized as the ability to move as in (30). In (31), depression is represented in terms of darkness, which is slowly pulling a depressed person towards more sadness and torment, whereas the recovery from depression is portrayed as the light the person might find, as in (32). This is in accordance with the studies by Reali et al., Tonon, and Barcelona Sánchez, who stated that depression is conceptualized in terms of darkness^[20, 23, 25].

In (33), depression is metaphorically described as a dark tunnel in which individuals with depression are searching for light, implying that they are looking to recover from this disorder. Another metaphor for the disorder identified in the corpus is DEPRESSION IS A BLACK FABRIC as in (34) in which depression is metaphorically construed as a black fabric which falls over the eyes of people with depressions preventing them from enjoying their lives as others.

In (35), depression is portrayed as an oppressive force that pushes an individual with depression into the abyss. This is in accordance with the works of Tonon and Barcelona Sánchez^[20, 25]. In (36), depression is also represented as a bounded place in which individuals with depression feel locked in their lives. This metaphorical conceptualization of depression goes in line with the findings of Reali et al., Tonon, and Barcelona Sánchez^[20, 23, 25].

This disorder is also metaphorically depicted as a downward movement since it prevents the person from carrying out their daily tasks and activities as in (37). In (38), depression is conceptualized as a path that patients are forced to pass through. This lends support to the view of Raiisi and Riyassi who maintained that path is used to conceptualize depression^[9]. Additionally, depression is portrayed as drowning, where the patient cannot save themselves, as in (39).

Other metaphors for the disorder identified in the corpus are DEPRESSION IS ISOLATION/DISCONNECTION (40), DEPRESSION IS BEING LOST (41), DEPRESSION IS WEIGHT (42), DEPRESSION IS IMBALANCE (43). These metaphors are also evident in the work of Tonon (2020) for the metaphorical conceptualization of depression.

4.1.3. Metaphors of Depressed Patients

In this section, the metaphors of the individuals with depression are presented below (examples 44–57, **Table 5**). People with depression are conceptualized as containers which are full of negative emotions and feelings, such as sorrow and torment as in (44), or as an empty container that includes nothing inside since feelings of emptiness are considered among the main symptoms of depression as in (45). This goes in line with the work of Charteris-Black and Coll-Florit et al. who posited that individuals suffering from depression are metaphorically described as containers for negative emotions^[22, 26]. A depressed mind is also conceptualized as a container of dark thought as in (46).

People with depression are also construed as machines that are no longer working, as in (47), or those that need to be recharged, as in (48), in order to start working again since depression is characterized by the inability to depressed patients to carry out daily activities. Conceptualizing individuals with depression as machines that do not work properly is found in the work of Coll-Florit et al. and Semino^[26, 29]. A depressed mind is also depicted as a machine that broke down as in (49).

In (50), depressed patients are metaphorically represented as fragile things that are easy to break since feelings of tearfulness, sadness, frustration, and hopelessness are common among depressed patients. This is in accordance with the view of Coll-Florit et al. who claimed that people with

depression are construed as easily broken and vulnerable things^[26].

Depressed individuals are also described as prisoners in a jail or a deep well, as in (51) and (52), respectively. This metaphor is directly associated with the following conceptual metaphor SADNESS IS CAPTIVITY^[21].

Depression is also conceptualized through the animal metaphor, where the individual is prey, with depression as the predator, as in (53), or as a goofy chicken as in (54), representing slow thinking, speaking, or body movements. Regarding the source domain of war, depressed patients are metaphorically conceptualized as colonies of latent pain as in (55) or as soldiers on the battlefield trying to defeat depression as in (56). Finally, in (57), a person with depression is metaphorically construed as a split self.

4.2. Metaphors of Medical Practice and Diagnosis

In this section, metaphors of medical practice and diagnosis are presented below. **Table 6** shows the frequency and percentage of the target domains of metaphors of medical practice and diagnosis.

As shown in examples 58–63 (**Table 7**), medicine used to treat depression is conceptualized as poison as in (58) or as fire as in (59) since the patient shows resistance to taking their medication. On the other hand, medicine is also depicted as a weapon that a patient uses to defeat depression as in (60). A doctor is construed as a judge who keeps interrogating patients with depression, as in (61). This goes in line with the work of Coll-Florit et al. (2021), who maintained that a doctor is metaphorically construed as a prosecutor who keeps interrogating patients^[26]. In the same vein, the diagnosis made by the doctor is represented as a verdict made by the judge. A doctor is also conceptualized as a prisoner, whereas the diagnosis made by him/her is depicted as a prison in which a depressed patient is kept as in (62). This also supports the findings of Coll-Florit et al. (2021), who stated that doctors are conceptualized as captors who lock people with depression into a diagnosis^[26]. On the other hand, a doctor is described as a lifeboat that saves people's lives from death, as in (63).

Table 5. Examples of conceptual metaphors depicting depressed patients.

Conceptual Metaphor	NO.	Example
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS A CONTAINER	44	يسكن الحزن والعذاب في داخلي دون أن يعلم أحد Sorrow and torment dwell in me without anyone knowing
	45	أشعر بأنني فارغة من الداخل ولا أعلم لماذا I feel empty inside, and I don't know why
DEPRESSED MIND IS A CONTAINER	46	أمتلأ دماغي بأفكار سوداوية لا أعلم مصدرها My brain is filled with dark thoughts whose source I do not know
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS A MACHINE	47	لقد تعطل جسدي وحواسي عن العمل كما كنت في السابق My body and my senses are no longer working as they used to be
	48	أحاول ان أعيد شحن نفسي كل يوم لعلني أستطيع أن أنجز شيئا ولكنني في كل مرة أفشل I try to recharge myself every day so that I can accomplish something, but every time I fail
DEPRESSED MIND IS A MACHINE	49	تعطل دماغي عندها عن العمل في تلك اللحظة My brain broke down at that moment
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS A THING	50	أشعر أنني هشة و ضعيفة لدرجة أنني قد أفسد في أي لحظة I feel so fragile and weak that I could break at any moment
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS A PRISONER	51	ما زلت أسيرا لهذا المرض اللعين I am still a prisoner of this dreaded disease
	52	لكن أنت تعرف أنك مسجون داخل ذلك البئر But you know that you are imprisoned inside that well
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS AN ANIMAL	53	أنا فريسة لمرض يسمى الإكتئاب I fall prey to a disease called depression
	54	أرى نفسي دجاجة بلهاء لا تتوقف عن القفز داخل حظيرة مغلقة I see myself as a goofy chicken that won't stop jumping inside a closed coop
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS A COLONY	55	أشعر بأنني مستعمرة للألم الكامن I feel like a colony of latent pain
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS A SOLDIER	56	مرضى الاكتئاب هم جنود في ساحة المعركة يحاولون الانتصار على عدو يغدر بهم في كل مرة يظنون بها أنهم انتصروا عليه Depressed patients are soldiers on the battlefield trying to defeat an enemy who betrays them every time they think they have won
PERSON WITH DEPRESSION IS SPLIT SELF	57	أشعر بأن نفسي مقسومة نصفين، قسم أعرفه جيدا وقسم آخر جديد لا أعلم عنه شيئا. I feel like I am divided into two halves, one part I know well and another new part I know .nothing about

Table 6. The frequency and percentage of the target domains of metaphors of medical practice and diagnosis.

Target Domains	Frequency of Metaphorical Expressions	Percentage
MEDICINE	23	65.71%
DIAGNOSIS	8	22.85%
DOCTOR	4	11.42%
Total	35	

Table 7. Examples of conceptual metaphors depicting medical practice and diagnosis.

Conceptual Metaphor	NO.	Example
MEDICINE IS POISON	58	يتوجب علي أن أتناول هذا السم الزعاف الذي يشل جسدي عن الحراك I have to take this terrifying poison that paralyzes my body
MEDICINE IS FIRE	59	بمجرد تناولتي للدواء أشعر باشتعال نار داخلي As soon as I take the medicine, I feel a fire burning inside me
MEDICINE IS A WEAPON	60	كانت حبة الدواء سلاحي الوحيد لمحاربة الاكتئاب The pill was my only weapon to fight depression
DOCTOR IS A JUDGE	61	بعد أن أنهى التحقيق معي لمدة عشرين دقيقة أصدر حكمه النهائي بأنني مصابة باكتئاب حاد After he finished interrogating me for twenty minutes, he issued his final verdict that I suffer from severe depression
DIAGNOSIS IS A PRISON	62	كان تشخيص الطبيب لي بالإكتئاب سجن آخر وضعت فيه لوحدي The doctor's diagnosis of depression for me was another prison in which I was placed alone
DOCTOR IS A PRISONER	63	شعرت بأنه هذا الطبيب هو قارب النجاة الذي سينقذني من الموت I felt that this doctor was the lifeboat that would save me from death

4.3. Metaphors of Interpersonal Communication and Social Context

In this section, metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context are presented below (examples 64–71, **Table 8**).

Table 9 shows the frequency and percentage of the target domains of metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context.

Prejudice is metaphorically described as a weight that depressed individuals cannot bear as in (64). It is also conceptualized as a powerful force that discourages patients from visiting psychiatric clinics as in (65). Additionally, prejudice is depicted as a mark or label that patients are forced to wear, as in (66). This supports the argument of Coll-Florit et al. who posited that discrimination in people's experiences of living with depression is metaphorically conceptualized as a

force, a mark, and a weight^[26].

Communication and lack of communication with depressed patients are metaphorically conceptualized in terms of distance as in (67) where people try to stay away from these patients. Consequently, lack of communication is also depicted as isolation since patients end up being isolated from the wide society as in (68). This is in accordance with the findings of Coll-Florit et al. (2021), who found that communication and lack of communication with depressed patients are conceptualized in terms of distance and isolation^[26].

The family of depressed patients is conceptualized as the cornerstone as in (69), implying the vital role a family plays in supporting their depressed family members. In contrast, strangers are portrayed as monsters as in (70) or ghosts as in (71) since they usually have negative attitudes and thoughts toward patients with mental disorders and they tend to avoid contact with them.

Table 8. Examples of conceptual metaphors depicting interpersonal communication and social context.

Conceptual Metaphor	NO.	Example
PREJUDICE IS A WEIGHT	64	<p>خوفهم من الإقتراب مني و الحديث معي جعلني أحمل عبئا أكثر مما كنت أحتمل</p> <p>Their fear of approaching me and talking to me made me carry a burden more than I could bear</p>
PREJUDICE IS A FORCE	65	<p>كانت نظرتهم الدونية تدفعني بقوة نحو التفكير بالتوقف عن زيارة العيادة النفسي</p> <p>Their view of inferiority strongly pushed me to think about stopping visiting the psychiatric clinic</p>
PREJUDICE IS A MARK	66	<p>ما زلت أخشى أن أخبر احدهم أنني أعاني من الإكتئاب حتى لا يسمني بالجنون</p> <p>I'm still afraid to tell someone that I suffer from depression lest they call me crazy</p>
LACK OF COMMUNICATION IS A DISTANCE	67	<p>كان الجميع يحاول الإبتعاد عني بدون أدنى سبب فانا لم أقترف أي ذنب</p> <p>Everyone was trying to stay away from me without the slightest reason, as I had not committed anything wrong</p>
LACK OF COMMUNICATION IS AN ISOLATION	68	<p>لم يعد احد يتصل بي وهذا ما زاد شعوري بالعزلة</p> <p>No one calls me anymore, and this increases my feeling of isolation</p>
FAMILY IS A CORNERSTONE	69	<p>كانت أسرتي حجر الأساس الذي بنيت عليه من جديد الأمل بأن أتعافي</p> <p>My family was the cornerstone upon which I built my hope for recovery</p>
PEOPLE ARE MONSTERS	70	<p>والمشكلة العظمى عندما تتسلل هذه الوحوش البشرية إلى ذواتنا</p> <p>The biggest problem is when these human monsters infiltrate our souls</p>
PEOPLE ARE GHOSTS	71	<p>أشعر بان الجميع من حولي هم أشباح تريد أن تلتهمني بدون رحمة أو شفقة</p> <p>I feel like everyone around me is ghosts that want to devour me without mercy or pity</p>

Table 9. The frequency and percentage of the target domains of metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context.

Target Domains	Frequency of Metaphorical Expressions	Percentage
PREJUDICE	33	55%
COMMUNICATION AND LACK OF COMMUNICATION	17	28.33%
PEOPLE OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXT	10	16.66%
Total	60	100%

5. Discussion

The current study provides a quantitative and qualitative account of the major types of metaphors of depression employed by people with depression in Arabic blogs. It reveals some metaphors that have already been found in previous research studies, and it also identifies new types of metaphors used to depict depression that were not detected in the literature. Depression is conceptualized in terms of living organisms, such as a HUMAN BEING, AN ANIMAL, A PLANT, and SUPERNATURAL CREATURES. This disorder is also conceptualized as darkness, whereas recovery from depression is light. Depression is metaphorically depicted as BAD WEATHER, A SEA, WATER, AUTUMN, WIND, A HURRICANE, and A WELL. It is portrayed as WAR, AN ENEMY, CANCER, PARALYSIS, BLACK FABRIC, FIRE, DARK TUNNEL, OPPRESSIVE FORCE, DOWNWARD MOVEMENT, BOUND SPACE, A PATH, and COLDNESS. Most metaphors used to conceptualize depression were found in the literature except for conceptualizing depression as A SEA, WATER, AUTUMN, WIND, A HURRICANE, A WELL, AN ANIMAL, A

BLACK FABRIC, and CANCER.

The same metaphors found in the current study and in the previous literature to portray depression are governed by universality, whereas those metaphors identified only in the present study result from cultural variations at the linguistic level. These metaphors are attributed to different cultural experiences, beliefs, and customs. The cultural variations are reflected in the metaphor used to conceptualize depression. For instance, depicting a depressed person as a goofy chicken is considered language-specific since, in the Arab culture, chicken symbolizes submissiveness and surrender. In parallel, a person with depression is extremely likely to surrender to this disorder, and thus, they discontinue their treatment and stop taking their medications.

Basically, 72.46% of identified metaphors are used to metaphorically conceptualize depression. In contrast, 17.39% of identified metaphors refer to interpersonal communication and social context, whereas 10.14% refer to medicine and professional treatment. These metaphors were used by blog writers to express some aspects that affect their

lives with depression. For instance, prejudice, lack of communication, and stigma are major issues that people with depression suffer from. In particular, prejudice was conceptualized AS A FORCE, A WEIGHT, A MARK, while lack of communication was metaphorically depicted as A DISTANCE and AN ISOLATION. These conceptualizations of prejudice are in line with the findings of Coll-Florit et al.^[26]. Another set of metaphors whose target domain is communicative aspects, such as communication and lack of communication. Lack of communication is metaphorically represented as A DISTANCE and AN ISOLATION. Family members are construed as CORNER-STONES since they support their members who suffer from depression, whereas strange people who try to avoid and exclude individuals with depression are depicted as GHOSTS and MONSTERS.

On the other hand, medicine was metaphorically portrayed as POISON, FIRE, or A WEAPON. Not a single instance of the metaphorical conceptualizations of medicine was found in the previous studies on the metaphors of depression. Doctors were conceptualized as JUDGES and LIFEBOATS. These aspects show the key role that the surrounding environment plays in the life of individuals with depression. The attested corpus in the present study shows the great importance of human beings who suffer from depression since they were metaphorically conceptualized extensively. For example, a person with depression is metaphorically construed as A CONTAINER, A THING, A MACHINE, A PRISONER, A COLONY, AN ANIMAL, and A SOLDIER. Conceptualizing people with depression as a prisoner, a colony, an animal, and a soldier was not found in the previous studies.

Life with depression was also described metaphorically in the corpus. For example, it is conceptualized as A JOURNEY, WAR, DARKNESS, DESERT, A FOREST, A RACE, BITTER FOOD, and A WRESTLING RING. The majority of these conceptualizations, except for war and journey, were not found in the literature of metaphors of depression. The blogging genre is considered a means of communication that allows individuals with depression to express themselves freely without any constraints since this genre is considered a first-person account.

6. Conclusions

The present study has explored the conceptual metaphors used in a corpus of 100 blogs written in Arabic by

people suffering from major depressive disorder. The results revealed that several metaphors are used in the corpus under the following categories of metaphors, namely, metaphors of depression, metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context, and metaphors of medicine and professional treatment, respectively. The metaphors of depression, which are the most frequent in the corpus, are represented through the following source domains, namely, LIVING ORGANISM, NATURE, WAR, DISEASE, and FORCE. Depressed patients are conceptualized in terms of the following source domains, viz., A CONTAINER, A MACHINE, AN ANIMAL, A COLONY, A SOLDIER, and A SPLIT-SELF. Concerning the metaphors of medical practice and diagnosis, medicine is represented by the following source domains: POISON, FIRE, and A WEAPON. Doctor is metaphorically depicted in terms of the following source domains: A JUDGE, A LIFE BOAT, and A PRISONER, whereas diagnosis is conceptualized as a prison. Regarding metaphors of interpersonal communication and social context, prejudice is conceptualized in terms of the following source domains: WEIGHT, FORCE, and A MARK. Lack of communication is represented by the following source domains: A DISEASE and ISOLATION. Family is represented as A CORNER-STONE, whereas other people are conceptualized as monsters and ghosts. Future research may investigate metaphors of depression in other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

Recognizing how Arabic-speaking patients use metaphors for depression can enhance therapeutic communication and culturally sensitive care. Understanding these metaphors helps practitioners interpret emotions, reframe negative perceptions, and tailor interventions to improve patient engagement and treatment outcomes.

This study focuses solely on Arabic blogs, limiting its ability to assess linguistic universality versus cultural specificity. A comparative analysis with English or other languages would provide deeper insights into shared and culture-specific metaphorical representations of depression. Future research could explore cross-linguistic comparisons to enhance the discussion on metaphor variation across cultures.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.A.R., M.D., A.S.H., and H.S.; methodology, A.S.H. and M.D.; validation, R.A.R., M.D.,

A.S.H., and H.S.; formal analysis, A.S.H.; investigation, R.A.R. and H.S.; resources, R.A.R. and H.S.; data curation, R.A.R. and Y.S.; writing—original draft preparation, R.A.R. and H.S.; writing—review and editing, A.S.H. and M.D.; visualization, H.S.; supervision, A.S.H.; project administration, A.S.H.. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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