International Journal of Innovative Research in Education, Technology & Social Strategies
p-ISSN: 2465-7298 | e-ISSN: 2467-8163
Volume 13, Number 1 September, 2026

IJIRETSS

The Intersecting Shadows of Violence: Herder-Crop Farmers' Conflict and Rising Incidents of Wife Inheritance (Levirate) Against the Female Folk in Mangu LGA, Plateau State

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijiretss.v13.i1.09

Abstract

This study investigated the structural relationship between herder-farmer conflicts and the prevalence of levirate marriage in Mangu Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. Driven by persistent regional insecurity, the research examined how conflict-induced vulnerabilities, socio-economic factors, and local legal institutions influence this customary practice. A mixed-methods design was adopted, utilizing quantitative data alongside qualitative insights from documentary reports and interviews with widows, community elders, and legal practitioners. The statistical analysis yielded critical insights into the contemporary drivers of these unions. First, a Chi-square (X^2) test accepted the alternative hypothesis, proving that herder-farmer conflicts significantly accelerate the practice. Violent clashes primarily claim male household heads, creating a demographic surge of vulnerable widows who accept levirate arrangements as an emergency safety net for physical protection and shelter. Second, a simple linear regression analysis validated those socio-economic drivers—specifically severe poverty and agricultural displacement—strongly predict the reliance on these marriages. Qualitative data corroborated that families enforce levirate custom as a structural defense mechanism to preserve contested ancestral land boundaries within the paternal lineage. Conversely, a One-Way ANOVA test failed to reject the null hypothesis, confirming that existing local legal institutions do not help to mitigate the practice. Formal statutory courts remain structurally toothless, financially inaccessible, and completely bypassed by rural patriarchal tribunals. Consequently, the study recommends providing immediate economic welfare funds to displaced widows to ensure independent survival. Furthermore, the state government must legally secure ancestral farmland rights directly to widows and their children, while the judiciary deploys free mobile legal clinics to collaborate with traditional rulers

Keywords: *Herder-Farmer Conflicts, Levirate Marriage, Socio-Economic Drivers, Legal Institutions, Mangu LGA.*

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Background of the Study

Mangu Local Government Area is one of the seventeen (17) local government areas in Plateau State. It is situated at central part of the state and shared boundaries with Barkin Ladi in the North, Pankshin in the South and Bokkos in the North West. The local government area is chiefly inhabited by Mwaghavul and the Pyem ethnic group. The Mwaghavul constitutes the majority and have 12 districts while the Pyem ethnic group have seven district (Cinjel & Danjuma, 2025).

Mangu Local Government Area in recent times have been confronted with series of attacks which has led to dead of many persons and many properties were destroyed. In the area, many of the inhabitants of the affected communities were displaced. Human Rights Watch in its documentary reports in 2024 states that:

> In the conflicts of 2023 to 2025 alone, over 850 persons were killed, 69 communities were displaced, and properties worth billions of Naira were destroyed. The most vulnerable groups were the grown-up men, and most of them were killed in the intermittent attacks.

The conflict in the area is predominantly between the arable farmers (Locals) and the Fulani herders who have settled in the different communities for decades. A lot of communities were affected by the attacks and the notable affected communities are: Murish, Kantoma, Kwaghaslalek, Fungzai, Tyop, Changal, Washana, Kyambos, Alogom, among others (Pam, 2024).

The conflict has brought a lot of woe in the society. The Local government area that in the past was seen as the hub of agricultural production in the state has been disposed of most of its fertile and vast land; this has led to decline in food production. Apart from decline in agricultural activities, women are vulnerable group in the attacks; a lot of their husbands were killed during the attacks and most of them were forced into levirate marriages (Dimelu, 2016). In Mangu Local Government, the dominant Mwaghavul Culture functions as a deeply rooted patriarchal society. In this structural framework, lineage, property ownership and community authority are exhaustively patrilineal. The intersection of this patriarchal system with current conflicts heavily influences the traditional practice of levirate marriages (Sulieman, 2024).

The herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt has escalated from localized, resource-based skirmishes into a highly destructive humanitarian crisis. Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) in Plateau State has emerged as a primary flashpoint of this violence, suffering severe casualties, village burnings, and mass displacements. While macroscopic research frequently highlights agricultural losses and national security threats, the microscopic, gendered ramifications on rural women remain profoundly understudied (Cinjel& Danjuma, 2025).

A critical but ignored consequence of this persistent violence is the soaring mortality rate among male smallholder farmers, which leaves behind a massive demographic of young

widows. In the patriarchal socio-cultural fabric of indigenous communities in Mangu LGA, these widows face immediate economic destitution and loss of land rights (Suleiman, 2024). To allegedly "protect" the deceased husband's lineage and retain familial land, local communities are increasingly resorting to levirate marriage—the customary practice where a widow is inherited by her deceased husband's brother. This study is designed to investigate how resource-driven warfare systematically forces women into involuntary marital inheritance (Dimelu, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Violent herder-farmer clashes in Mangu LGA have systematically decimated the male population, upended agrarian livelihoods, and driven human capital degradation. However, the direct spill over of this conflict into the domestic subjugation of the female folk remains a critical blind spot. Local widows are caught between conflict-induced poverty and deeply entrenched customary laws. Deprived of independent land ownership, many women face extreme pressure to submit to levirate marriages. Instead of providing traditional social security, this practice increasingly manifests as an abusive coping mechanism, leading to psychological trauma, a loss of bodily autonomy, and a cycle of reproductive health vulnerabilities. There is an urgent need to empirically map how armed conflict acts as an accelerant for harmful, archaic cultural practices targeting the female folk in Mangu LGA

Research Questions

1. How has the escalation of the herder-farmer conflict directly influenced the statistical rate of widowhood in Mangu LGA?
2. What specific socio-cultural norms and economic factors coerce conflict-affected widows into accepting levirate marriages?
3. How effective are local institutional frameworks, customary courts, and civil society interventions in protecting the human and land rights of widows?

Research Objectives

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the intersection between the herder-farmer conflict and the rising prevalence of levirate marriage among women in Mangu LGA.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the frequency of herder-farmer conflict incidents and their direct contribution to widowhood among the female folk in Mangu LGA.
2. Examine the socio-cultural and economic drivers fuelling the recent surge in levirate marriages among conflict-affected widows.
3. Identify existing institutional gaps in legal protections and land-tenure frameworks that leave windows vulnerable to cultural exploitation.

Hypotheses of the Study

H01: There is no significant relationship between the frequency of herder-farmer conflict incidents and the increasing rate of widowhood among the female folk in Mangu LGA

H02: Socio-cultural and economic drivers (such as familial pressure and severe poverty) do not significantly fuel the surge in levirate marriages among conflict-affected widows

H03: Existing institutional gaps in legal protections and land-tenure frameworks do not significantly increase the vulnerability of conflict-affected widows to cultural exploitation.

Conceptual Review

(a) Conflict

Conflict arises from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals or groups in defined social and physical environments. Change in the social environment, such as access to new political position, or perceptions of new resources arising from development in the physical environment, are fertile grounds for conflicts involving individuals and groups who are interested in using these new resources to achieve their goals. By recognizing the inherent nature of conflict in heterogeneous and competitive situations, people, more or less compellingly, sustain their societies as ongoing social system through the resolution, transformation and management of conflicts (Cinjel & Akende, 2015).

One of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict regards it as "a struggle over values claims to scarce resources power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals" (Coser, 2010: 10). In the same direction, Park and Burgess (cited in Abdu, 2010) argue that "conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and achieve some kind of unity even if it is through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties".

Conflict may not be regarded only in a negative light of dysfunctional or disjunctive process and a breakdown of communication as some scholars tend to suggest (Lundberg, 2000). Conflict is a conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication. Together with, though distinct from competition, struggle, and contest, etc. conflict is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce. Although conflict may generally exist "wherever incompatible activities occur" (Deutsch, 2000,p156), and may result in a win-lose situation; the resolution, transformation and management of conflict may produce a "win-win" outcome.

Hence Coser (2010, p10) elaborate definition of conflict becomes a useful clarification:

> Social conflict may be defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rival. Such conflict may take place between individual, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities. Inter-group as well as intra-group conflicts are perennial features of social life.

(b) Herder & A Fulani Herder

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English stressed that the word *Herder* originated from the *Old English* word *Herd* – and this denote a keeper or owner of large group of animals. It is also seen as somebody who tends to domesticate animals. It's also somebody who keeps and drives animals in groups, especially in an open pasture or land.

The word is Synonymic to wordings such as pastoralist, herdsmen, herdspersons, livestock farmers, breeders, ranchers, squire, breeders and a lot of others. The word herder as applied to the context in Nigeria is someone who is in possession of livestock most especially cows. They are mostly referenced as persons who domesticate animals such as: cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, Carmel and a lot of others. According to Stephenson (2016), a herder in Nigeria is someone who herds livestock and from the Fulfulde speaking ethnic group. Sanni (2016) sees a herder in Nigeria as any individual who own a large collection of livestock such as sheep, cows, goats, horse, donkey, Carmel and lots of others. The two definitions above attempted to point out that the word herder in Nigerian parlance is a generic name for any individual from any ethnic setup that rears or keep livestock. The definition also narrowed the meaning of the concept to only individuals who keep cattle and failed to incorporate other keepers of animal such as: sheep, goats, dogs, pigs and other domestic animals.

The term Fulani herders on the other is seen as any person from the Fulani ethnic group or Fulfulde speaking language of the Nilo-Sahara family who keeps livestock or domesticated animals such as cows, sheep, goats, Carmel, donkeys and a lot of others. Stephenson (2016) advocated that a Fulani herder is livestock keeper and may be either transhumance or living a sedentary lifestyle. He went further to stress that the Fulani herders must not necessary be from Nigeria. He or she can be from other countries. The Fulfulde speaking ethnic groups are also in countries such as Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and a lot of others.

Sanni (2015) also stressed that a Nigerian Fulani herder is different from a Fulani herder that comes from others countries or neighboring countries. He attempted to draw an analogy by stressing that the Nigerian Fulani herder possesses certain attribute such as acculturation, friendliness, sociability and that differentiate them from Fulani herders from other countries. Johnson (2016) in the same direction state that the loose border in the northern part of the country created grounds for the infiltration of other Fulani Herders of other countries into the shore of the country. He stressed further that what the two groups shared in common is religion and the language which they speak. There are some differences and variation in languages they speak. This can be seen in their stress pattern, intonation and usages of vocabulary. The Nigerian Fulani ethnic group speaks Hausa language fluently and conflates with the Hausa people while those penetrating through the border have no knowledge of the Hausa language (Lenshie, Okengwu,Ogbonna & Ezeibe, 2021).

In Nigeria, most of the Fulani herders are members of the Meyetti Allah Cattle breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), a group that seek to protect, organize and defend and carter for the needs of Fulani herders in Nigeria. The Nigerian Fulani herders are not mostly

transhumance as compare to their compatriot in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Thus, there is a difference between a Nigerian Fulani herder and a Fulani herder that infiltrate into the shore of the country to herd (Yusufu, Audu & Akuva, 2020).

What is Levirate Marriage (Widow Inheritance)?

The term comes from the Latin word "levir", meaning brother-in-law. A levirate marriage is also known as widow marriage. It is a kind of marriage that a widow is either forced or lured to marry a brother-in-law or any of his kinsmen after the husband has died. It is a practice where a man married his deceased brother's widow, particularly if the brother died without an heir (Baura & Shuaibu, 2023). The custom was intended to preserve the deceased family line, protect his widow social and economic security, and ensure his inheritance stayed within the family (Cinjel& Kefas 2021; Nnaji, Ratna, Renwick& Ma, 2023).

Types of levirate Marriage

There are different types of levirate marriage. These are:

a. **Forced Type:** In this type, the tradition imposed on its widow to marry either her deceased brother's younger or elder brother. It is mandatory and is traditionally imposed on her.
b. **Family line Preservation Type of Levirate Marriage:** In this type, what driven the marriage was the preservation of the family. The brother is asked to marry the widow as to preserve the family line of his deceased brother.
c. **Loosed type of Levirate Marriage:** In this type, it must not be a direct brother of the deceased persons. Any person in the clan, any of the kinsmen who has interest could be allowed to marry the widow
d. **Arranged Levirate Marriage:** In this type, the marriage is arranged. The successor of the widow must not be from the family. The family of the deceased can choose to introduce any person they feel like to preserve their family line.
e. **Protection Levirate Type of Marriage:** In this type, what motivated the cause is protection. It is believed that if she or the widow remarried a kinsman, she would be protected. He (the new husband) will also provide for her needs and the children of the deceased husband.

Evolution of Levirate Marriage

The history of levirate marriage is as old as the history of mankind; it has been in existence for a longer period of time. It was practiced in almost all the society. It was more prevalence in a patriarchal society than a non –patriarchal society (Okeye, Ezeani,Onah, Ekelekwe, Akov & Agbo 2021).

The book of Genesis provides an early example with Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. The story of Ruth is also a classical example. The marriage was common in Africa and in Nigeria, precisely. It only declines with the spread of Christianity which discouraged its practices. It also continues in some parts of the world today as cultural, rather than religious practice, particularly in parts of Africa and Asia (Cinjel &Danjuma 2025).

Nature and History of Arable Farmers-Herders Conflict in Mangu Local Government

The conflict between the Fulani herders and Mwaghavul ethnic group has a long history; the conflicts have different causes at different period. In the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, what mostly led to minor dispute between the two ethnic groups was the damage caused to the crops of the Mwaghavul arable farmers due to either negligence or carelessness. These disputes, at the time were easily managed by traditional institutions and the Police Force, thus preventing a full-blown conflict (Cinjel, Musa & Umaru, 2018). In 2007, there was a dispute between a Mwaghavul man and a Fulani man over a land. The Mwaghavul man claimed that his father was a friend to the father of the Fulani man and that his father before his death temporarily gave his said friend (the father of the Fulani man) a portion of land on mutual trust. The parties later on passed away and the son of the Mwaghavul man returned home after retirement from active service with the Plateau State government and wanted to retrieve the possession of the land but the other son of his father's friend (the Fulani man) disputed the fact and this led to a tussle. The Mwaghavul youth in *Daika* angrily went and set the house of the Fulani man ablaze; and they forcefully asked him to leave the area. The aggrieved Fulani took the case to the C Division of the Nigerian Police in Jos. All the Mwaghavul youth that participated in the act were reprimanded and were ordered to pay the acclaimed money and properties that the Fulani man claimed to have lost as a result of the tussle (Cinjel, Musa & Umaru 2018).

In the 2000s, there were high incidents of armed robbery in places like *Bwai, Ncha, Chisu, Alogom, Giambos, Shimilang* and *Daika* areas. Several of the people that were caught by the police in the act were mostly the Fulani youths in the mentioned areas. In 2021, 3 police officers were killed during a clash with robbers along Bwai road and the culprits found were Fulani youths in the community. The activities of the police, vigilante group and the association of hunters helped to nip the incident to its bud (Stephenson, 2024).

Aside the incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping became more prevalent in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023. It was frequently done in places like *Kantoma, Mangul, Mairana, Bungha-Dawo, Daika, Sabon Gari,* among others. Many people were kidnapped and several culprits that were caught in the act were the Fulani youth in the community. There were several meeting and dialogue between the traditional institutions of the Mwaghavul people and Fulani herders. Beside the mentioned vices, the destruction of the farmers' crop kept reoccurring. The destructions were mostly done in the night and on Sundays; when the arable farmer is not in the farm (Stephenson, 2024). Several reports were filed by the affected farmers at the different police stations in the local government area but there was no record of arrest. It did not stop the destruction of crops; the cattle of the indigenous people were rustled in almost all the districts that constituted the Mwaghavul chiefdom in the local government area. The crops damage and cow rustling kept re-occurring despite the intervention of the Nigerian Police Force and the traditional institutions from concerned parties. On 20th August 2022, a Mwaghavul arable farmer out of annoyance shot a Fulani herder whom he caught herding on his crops. The arable farmer was arrested by the police and later imprisoned. The traditional institution of the Mwaghavul ethnic divide sat with the leadership of MACBAN in the local government to discuss how a lasting solution could be found; to help put an end to the issue but all to the contrary (Human Right Watch, 2024).

On 5th May, 2023, a Fulani herder (youth) was herding and left the cattle to destroy the crop of a young Mwaghavul man. The young farmer insisted that he must be compensated. In the process of the settlement, the herder rejected what he was charged by the arable farmer and the arable farmer out of annoyance slapped the herder for what he had considered as an insult. The herder on his part picked his herding stick and hit the crop farmer on the head. The crop farmer felt on the ground and collapsed; several attempts to revive him proved abortive and when he was taken to the hospital, he was declared dead on arrival (DOA). The youth from Kiwes were bitter and went after the herder. They went and heard that the herder had left the community. They then projected their aggression on his younger brother. On 8th May, 2023, the Fulani herder in the *Kiwes* villages carried out an attack at the area and in the attack, several persons were killed and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed. On 10th of May, 2023, the Mwaghavul youth in *Kiwes* and those in the neighbouring villages launched a reprisal attack and in the attack, several Fulani herders were also killed along with their cattle (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

On 15th May, 2023 and around 3 pm, 13 villages were attacked by the Fulani'**s** herders in Mangu Local Government Area. In the coordinated attacks, several persons (men, youth, women and children) were killed; several houses, churches and agricultural produces were destroyed. The affected villages were: Chisu, Mangul, Kibat, Jwakchom, Ting, Alogom, Kantoma, Tyop, Kombili, Changkal, Gwet, Njing, Dang Dai, Farin Kasa, Murish, among others. In the attacks, several persons were displaced and many communities were deserted. This was what led to other attacks in the local government area in 2023. The Fulani herders were forced out of the southern part of the local government; and many of the Fulani herders moved to the northern side and settled with the Pyem and the Kwangka ethnic groups. Some of the Fulani that have no cow went and settled among the Hausa communities living in *Sabon Kasuwa, Sohon Kasuwa, Angwan Pyemawa areas,* among others (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Dislodged and deserted Mwaghavul communities like Tyop, Alogom, Changal, Washna, Kombili, Ndang Dai, among others were grains like maize, irrigated Irish potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, among others were farmed at commercial quantity

Table 1: Clashes between the Mwaghavul Arable farmers and the Fulani herders

S/N	Year	Nature
1.	2007	The confront at Diaka
2.	May, 3, 2023	The first attack at Kiwes
3.	May, 7, 2023	Reprisal Attack
4.	May, 9, 2023	Attack at Chisu
5.	May 15, 2023	Coordinated Attack on 13 villages
6.	1st June 2023	Clash between Muslim and Christians in Mangu Town
7.	24 December	Attack at some villages
8.	23 ∝ 24 January 2024	Muslim-Christian clash in Mangu Town
9.	24 January, 2024	The massacre of all villagers in Kwaghaslalek

Source: Researchers' Survey, 2024

On 20th January, 2004, the Fulani herders attacked the Sabon Gari Village, inflicted injuries on 5 youths, and burnt several properties. In an attempt to retaliate, the Mwaghavul youths drove out all the Fulani herders in *Tyop*. At the hearing of the scene, the youth of the Hausa ethnic group along with the indigenous Mwaghavul Muslim residing inside Mangu town precisely in *Sabon Kasuwa, Sohon Kasuwa, Angwan Pyemawa, Lahir, Angwan* Malti, among others became aggrieved; they came out and set ablaze the houses of the Christians living among them. The Christians in other side of the town (Bungha, Dawo, Angwan mission, Angwan Sarki, Chichim, among others also retaliated by setting ablaze the houses of the Hausa and Muslims living among them. Major roads were barricaded; worship centres were burnt, several persons were killed and several shops were ransacked, among others. It was as a result of this; the Plateau State Government declared 24 hours curfew in the town. Even with the curfew, Kwaghaslalek, a village that housed the *NYSC camp* was attacked in the early hours of 24th January 2024. In the attack, all the 30 persons living in the village were killed and this further deepened the crisis (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Nexus between Mangu Conflicts and Levirate Marriage

Mangu Local Government is one of the seventeen (17) Local Government areas of Plateau State and is predominantly inhabited by the Mwaghavul and the Pyem ethnic groups. The local government area of recent, had witnessed series of intermittent conflicts between arable farmers who are mostly the locals and the settled herders who are chiefly the Fulani ethnic group. The conflict started as minor attacks and in the later part of 2023 and 2024 became a recurrent phenomenon. In the attacks, several persons were killed, many households were displaced and goods worth billions of naira were destroyed. Human Right Watch in 2025 in its documentary states that in the attack in 2024:

> Over 850 persons were killed, 15,000 persons were displaced and there were about 10 IDPs camps in the local government. And many fled to nearby communities that were not attacked; many properties such as foods, houses, worship centres, schools and animal worth billions of naira were destroyed.

They went on to state that the attacks were coordinated and intermittent in their approach. The Mwaghavul arable farmers were the most affected group and the conflicts have affected many socio-economic activities in their communities. The most affected communities are: Fungzai , Kubwat, Kwashaslalek, Changal, Konbeli, Washna, Vodni, Kantoma, Mairana, among others. Statistical record by the information unit of the local government states that:

> In the attacks, over 69 communities were forcefully attacked. These communities used to be the hub of agricultural production in the local government area. The local government that is known for the production of staple crop like maize, millet, guinea corn, tomatoes, sweet potato among others is now battling with insufficiency of food and bloodshed

Apart from the appalling effect on agricultural practice, many homes have lost their bread winners and many women have turned to be widows. The Mwaghavul people practice patriarchal system that tent to give more advantage to the Male folk. The traditional institutions are based on kingship. The patriarchal framework manifest across social organizational, marriage customs and traditional leadership structure. In the society, property, family names, and land rights are passed down from fathers to son. Like many similar patriarchal structures, women traditionally face severe cultural inhibitions regarding direct land ownership and inheritance.

The devastating recent attacks in Mangu Local Government area have weaponized the existing Mwaghavul patriarchal system inadvertently triggering an explosion of levirate (widow Inheritance) marriages across many communities as a desperate survival mechanism. The severe ethno-religious and arable farmers- herders' violence has claimed over 800 lives, displaced 650 residents and created a massive unprecedented crisis of widow hood.

The crisis is rooted in the deliberate targeting of the male population. In overnight raid, assailants systematically execute husbands, fathers and sons directly aiming to collapse the Ngulu- the traditional male headed household. Because the Mwaghavul customary dictates that land ownership and ancestral lineage flow strictly through men, the sudden eradication of these male heads creates a catastrophic legal and economic vacuum. Surviving wives and daughters find themselves displaced and structurally bared from inheriting or defending their family's land making them richly vulnerable to land grabbing and absolute poverty.

In response to this immense humanitarian crisis, many communities have turned to the traditional safety net of levirate marriage, forcing its rapid spread across the region. To prevent ancestral land from being permanently lost or abandoned, extended family members pressured the surviving brothers to marry the widows of the deceased. This arrangement ensures that property remains within the male lineage of the clan (Deskagham) while absorbing destitute women and fatherless children into a new household. The large scale of the attacks has begun to erode deep seated cultural boundaries; certain sub-clans such as the Mangu people, who historically viewed widow inheritance as strict spiritual taboo, have been forced to quietly tolerate this arrangement to prevent total social collapse.

Yet, amid this bleak landscape, a profound shift is occurring as modern Mwaghavul women refuse to be passive commodities of a patriarchal system driven by the trauma of conflict, women have taken a vanguard role in community resistance. Rather than quietly submitting to forced levirate union or relying entirely on male elders, thousands of women have mobilized public protest marching with symbolic leaves and directly confronting traditional rulers and government officials.

Historical Overview the Mwaghavul Patriarchal System and Levirate Marriage

The historical development of the Mwaghavul people of Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State is deeply rooted in a strict patrilineal and patriarchal social system. In his

comprehensive anthropological work, Cinjel (2020) traces the holistic cultural framework of the Mwaghavul, detailing how ancestral lineage, social status and territorial wealth are strictly preserved through male-headed units like the Ngulu (head of household) and Deskagham (clan) while cosmological traditions hint that pre-colonial religious structures once venerated a supreme feminine deity (Nanaan), a historical shift occurred wherein men seized control of traditional shrines and masquerade to institutionalize traditional authority. Within this patriarchy, women were assigned a dependent status relying on male relatives or spouses for economic security and legal standing.

Accounting to Cinjel (2020), the Mwaghavul traditionally maintained an exceptionally high premium bride price requiring suitors to fulfil substantial material and financial demands before marriage could be attain customary legality. Cinjel (2020) argues that while bride price served as core pillar of cultural validation, the exorbitant economic requirement placed an unequal burden on women in advertently treating them as transferable lineage assets.

To protect these assets and maintain communal continuity, levirate marriage became a vital customary mechanism. Within broader patriarchal societies, levirate marriage functioned to safeguard the deceased husband's blood line and ensure that the ancestral lands (Dyel Maar) did not exit the clan's custody. For most Mwaghavul sub-clans, this practice operated as an indigenous welfare safety net, absorbing young widows and their fatherless children back into a protective, male -headed familial ecosystem (WHO,2002).

However, historical records reveal a striking regional anomaly regarding this custom. As documented in historical analysis, the people of Mangun stood as unique exception in the region, completely forbidding the practice of widow's inheritance from time immemorial. In Mangun cultural belief, engaging in a levirate union was seen as a strict spiritual taboo capable of invoking supernatural calamities upon the family. By passing or cleansing this curse required severe intricate and highly costly spiritual rituals. Consequently, while neighboring clans routinely utilized levirate unions to preserve property and provide security, historical Mangun widows had to navigate the restriction of the patriarchal system without the option of clan marriage.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories of conflict but this study utilized the structural violence conflict which states that violence occur when the organization of society systematically prevents certain individuals or groups from accessing basic human needs, opportunities, rights and resources

To anchor this study conceptually, the most appropriate theoretical framework is **Structural Violence Theory**, originally formulated by Johan Galtung in 1969 and later expanded by medical anthropologist, Paul Farmer.

Structural Violence Theory poses those social structures—economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural—can inflict systematic harm upon individuals or groups, preventing them from meeting their basic human needs and achieving their full potential. Unlike behavioural violence, which involves a clear, direct actor committing physical assault, structural violence is silent, institutionalized, and often embedded into the normal operations of a society. It creates unequal life chances and systematically compromises human dignity without a singular visible perpetrator.

Core Tenets of the Theory

1. **Avoidable Impairment of Human Needs:** Violence exists when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations. If this gap is avoidable, violence is occurring.
2. **Institutionalized and Actorless:** The violence is built into the structure of society and shows up as unequal power dynamics and consequently as unequal life chances. There may not be a specific person directly hitting someone; rather, the system itself does the damage
3. **Intersectionality and Social Stratification:** Structural violence does not affect everyone equally. It clusters heavily along lines of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geography, pushing vulnerable groups (like rural women) to the absolute margins
4. **Normalization of Suffering:** Because these structures are traditional, legal, or deeply cultural, the resulting suffering is often naturalized and accepted by society as "just the way things are" rather than being recognized as an active violation of human rights.

Application of the Theory to the Study in Mangu LGA

Applying this theory allows the study to move past viewing levirate marriage merely as an isolated "bad cultural practice," framing it instead as a direct symptom of intersecting violent systems:

1. **The Intersection of Two Structural Forces:** In Mangu LGA, rural women are caught at the crossroads of two violent structures: the macro-structural political economy of the **herder-farmer conflict** (which kills their husbands and destroys their farming assets) and the micro-structural patriarchy of **indigenous customary laws** (which denies them independent land inheritance).
2. **The Erosion of Choice and Autonomy:** The theory explains why a widow "chooses" to enter into a levirate marriage. Under Structural Violence Theory, this is not a free-will choice. The system has intentionally stripped her of her husband, her security, and her economic lifeline (land). Her submission to marital inheritance is an artificial choice engineered by structural destitution
3. **Institutional Gaps as Structural Violence:** The statutory legal system's failure to protect widows, coupled with the state's inability to stop the herder-farmer raids, constitutes a form of political structural violence. The lack of legal implementation reinforces the customary courts' power to enforce widow inheritance under the guise of family preservation

4. **The Normalization of Harm:** By utilizing this theory, the research can demonstrate how local communities normalize levirate marriage as a "benevolent safety net" for widows, while structurally masking the severe psychological trauma, loss of reproductive autonomy, and economic exploitation experienced by the female folk

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design. This approach allows the concurrent collection of quantitative data (to establish statistical trends between conflict metrics and marriage rates) and qualitative data (to capture the lived experiences and nuanced testimonies of the affected female folk).

Area of Study

The study is conducted in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State, Nigeria. Mangu spans an area of approximately 1,653 km^2 and comprises several agrarian districts heavily hit by ethno-religious and resource-driven skirmishes. Sampling will specifically target worst-affected districts such as Mangu, Kombun, Panyam, Pushit, Ampang West and Gindiri.

Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample Size

1. **Target Population:** The population consists of conflict-affected widows, rural women, community leaders (such as district heads and traditional rulers), women leaders (Magajiyas), and local human rights activists.
2. **Sampling Technique:** A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, purposive sampling will select four districts with the highest recorded incidents of herder-farmer attacks. Second, snowball sampling identifies and locate widows who have undergone or are facing pressure to enter into levirate marriages, given the sensitive nature of the topic.
3. **Sample Size:** Quantitative survey questionnaires were administered to 310 respondents (calculated using the Cochran formula for unknown populations in rural areas). Qualitatively, 8 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) (6–8 participants per session) and 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) was executed.

Instruments for Data Collection

1. **Quantitative:** A structured questionnaire titled *Conflict and Customary Marriage Assessment Questionnaire (CCMAQ)* was deployed via trained local enumerators speaking Hausa and Mwaghavul.
2. **Qualitative:** Semi-structured interview guides were employed to dictate the flow of KIIs and FGDs, allowing survivors to share their experiences safely.

Method of Data Analysis

1. **Quantitative Data:** Data was cleaned and coded into SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) was used to summarize demographic data. Inferential statistics (such as Chi-square tests or Multiple Logistic Regression) was

used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

2. **Qualitative Data:** Audio recordings from interviews was transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and analyzed using Thematic Analysis aided by NVivo software to map recurring patterns of domestic subjugation and systemic violence.

Data Presentation and Results

This section presents and analyses the data obtained from the field. The study employed simple descriptive statistical tools such as tables, percentages and frequency counts. In the course of the study, 310 questionnaires were administered while 300 were retrieved. This shows that the study had approximately 97% rate of return.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

S/N	Characteristics	Responses	Percentage (%)
1	**Sex**		
	(a) Male	130	43
	(b) Female	170	57
	Total	**300**	**100**
2	**Religion**		
	(a) Christianity	220	73
	(b) Islam	70	23
	(c) Others	20	4
	Total	**300**	**100**
3	**Age Bracket**		
	(a) 18–20	10	4
	(b) 21–30	50	17
	(c) 31–40	200	79
	(d) 41 and above	40	12
	Total	**300**	**100**
4	**Educational Qualification**		
	(a) FSLC	40	12
	(b) SSCE	40	12
	(c) NCE/ND	100	36
	(d) First Degree and above	120	40
	Total	**300**	**100**
5	**Marital Status**		
	(a) Married	80	27
	(b) Single	80	27
	(c) Widow/Widower	80	27
	(d) Divorced/Separated	60	19
	Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026

The table above shows that 130 of the respondents, representing 43%, were from the male folk, while 170 of the respondents, representing 57%, were from the female folk. The study prioritizes the female folk because they are the most affected group with vast knowledge of the act.

The table above also shows that 220 of the respondents professed the Christian faith, while 70 of the respondents representing 23% of the responses, professed Islam. The table further shows that 20 of the respondents, representing 4% of the responses were adherers of other faiths. This shows that a sense of belonging was given to all faiths, and that Christianity is the most dominant religion in the study area.

The table above also shows that 10 of the respondents, representing 4% fall under the age bracket of 18 to 20; 50 of the respondents representing 17% fall under the age bracket of 21 to 30, 200 of the respondents representing 79% of the responses fall under the age bracket of 31 to 40 and 40 of the respondents, representing 12% fall under the age bracket of 41 and above. This shows that all age brackets were given sense of participation, and that the majority of the participants fall under the age bracket of 31 to 40.

The table also shows that 40 of the respondents representing 12% were holders of the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), another 40 of the respondents representing another 12% were holders of the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE), 100 of the respondents representing 36% of the responses possessed the National Certificate in Education / National Diploma (NCE/ND) and 120 of the respondents, representing 40% possessed a first degree and other higher qualifications. This shows that the majority of the respondents are learned. This aligns with the perception of Saleh (2024), who stressed that Mangu L.G.A., and specifically the Mwaghavul ethnic group are learned and are the most educated ethnic group in the zone and the state at large.

The table above shows that 80 of the respondents, representing 27% of the responses were married; another 80 of the respondents, representing another 27% of the responses were single, another 80 of the respondents, representing another 27% were widows/widowers, and 60 of the respondents, representing 19% of the responses were separated/divorced. This shows that the research involved various marital groups. The distribution also reveals that those who were married, single and widowed/widowers are of significant numbers. It also shows that divorce is common and that the conflicts have enormous impact on the rate of widowhood in the study area. This aligns with the study of Amos (2025), who states that a lot of people were killed as a result of the intermittent conflict and that this contributes to the high rate of widowhood in the study area.

Thematic Presentation of Objective One

This objective seeks to assess how the intermittent conflict contributes to wife inheritance among the female folk in Mangu L.G.A. A five-point Likert rating scale was provided to the respondents to express their views.

Table 3: Relationship between the Intermittent Conflict and Levirate Marriage

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
1	High mortality rate of married young men	270 (90)	10 (3.3)	10 (3.3)	5 (1.7)	5 (1.7)	4.8	0.7
2	Survival mechanism to escape sudden poverty	270 (90)	10 (3.3)	10 (3.3)	5 (1.7)	5 (1.7)	4.8	0.7
3	Retention of ancestral property within the family lineage	270 (90)	10 (3.3)	10 (3.3)	5 (1.7)	5 (1.7)	4.8	0.7
4	Physical protection within the community	270 (90)	10 (3.3)	10 (3.3)	5 (1.7)	5 (1.7)	4.8	0.7
5	Maintain clan cohesion	270 (90)	10 (3.3)	10 (3.3)	5 (1.7)	5 (1.7)	4.8	0.7

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026
Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

The table above shows that 270 of the respondents, representing 90% of the responses strongly acknowledged the notion that the high mortality rate of married young men contributes to wife inheritance in Mangu L.G.A, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% of the responses, also supported the view; 10 of the respondents, representing 3.3% of the responses were irresolute in their stand; 5 of the respondents representing 1.7%, rejected the view; and another 5 of the respondents representing another 1.7% strongly rejected the view. This shows that the high mortality rate among the male folk contributed to levirate marriage in the study area. This aligns with the report of Human Rights Watch (2025), which states that over 850 persons were killed and over 250 were injured.

The table above also shows that 270 of the respondents representing 90% of the total responses, strongly subscribed to the view that many young widows venture into levirate marriage because they consider it a survival mechanism to escape sudden poverty; 10 of the respondents, representing 3.3% supported the view; another 10 of the respondents, representing another 3.3% vacillated over their stands; 5 of the respondents, representing 1.7% rejected the view; and another 5 of the respondents representing another 1.7% of the responses, convincingly rejected the notion. This shows that levirate marriage is considered to be a survival mechanism to escape sudden poverty.

The table above also shows that 270 of the respondents representing 90% of the total responses strongly subscribed to the view that many young widow venture into levirate marriage because they consider it as a survival mechanism to escape sudden poverty, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% supported the view; another 10 of the respondents,

representing another 3.3%, were uncertainty over their stands; 5 of the respondents representing 1.7% rejected the view; and another 5 of the respondents representing another 1.7% of the responses convincingly rejected the notion. This thus shows that leverage marriage is consider to be a survival mechanism to escape sudden poverty.

The table above also shows that 270 of the respondents representing 90% of the responses, strongly attested to the notion that retention of ancestral property within the family is one of the major factors that stimulate levirate marriage; 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% of the responses also supported the view, another 10 of the respondents representing another 3.3% were uncertain with their positions; 5 of the respondents representing 1.7% of the responses, rejected the view and another 5 of the respondents representing another 1.7% staunchly rejected the view. From the analysis, it is clear that the need to retain ancestral property within the family contributes to the prevalence of levirate marriage in Mangu L.G.A.

The table above reveals that 270 of the respondents representing 90% of the responses, strongly consented to the view that the need for physical protection is one of the major factors that promote levirate marriage; 10 of the respondents representing 3.3%, assented to the view; another 10 of the respondents, representing 3.3% of the responses were irresolute; 5 of the respondents, representing 1.7% of the responses opposed the view; and another 5 of the respondents representing another 1.7% strongly rejected the view. This shows that the need for physical protection also stimulates wife inheritance in the study area.

The table above also shows that 270 of the respondents representing 90% of the responses strongly subscribed to the notion that clan cohesion is one of the factors that stimulate wife inheritance, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% of the responses asserted to the notion, another 10 of the respondents representing another 1.7% of the responses refuted the view and another 5 of the respondents representing another 1.7% of the responses vehemently rejected the view. This thus shows that clan cohesion is also one of those factors that stimulate wife inheritance in Mangu L.G.A.

Thematic Presentation and Analysis of Objective Two

The objective seeks to examine the socio-cultural and drivers fueling the recent surge in levirate marriage among conflict-affected widows in Mangu L.G.A. Likert 5-point scale was provided to the respondents to express their view.

Table 4: Socio-Economic Drivers of Levirate Marriage

S/N	Items	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %	COM	SD
	Family pressure encourages the act	280 (93.3)	10 (3.3)	2 (0.7)	4 (1.3)	4 (1.3)	4.9	0.6
	Severe poverty is a driver	280 (93.3)	10 (3.3)	2 (0.7)	4 (1.3)	4 (1.3)	4.9	0.6
	To secure long term inheritance	280 (93.3)	10 (3.3)	2 (0.7)	4 (1.3)	4 (1.3)	4.9	0.6
	The strong patriarchal structures in the area	280 (93.3)	10 (3.3)	2 (0.7)	4 (1.3)	4 (1.3)	4.9	0.6
	Lack of formal employment opportunities for woman in rural Mangu	280 (93.3)	10 (3.3)	2 (0.7)	4 (1.3)	4 (1.3)	4.9	0.6

Source: Researchers field work, 2026

The table above reveals that 280 of the respondents representing 93.3% of the total respondents strongly acknowledged the view that family pressure contribute to widow marriage on women in Mangu, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% of the responses supported the view, 2 of the respondents representing 0.7% were irresolute, 4 of the respondents representing 1.3% of the respondents rejected the view and another 4 of the respondents representing another 1.3% of the responses strongly refused the view. This thus shows that pressure from family encourage levirate marriage on women in Mangu. This flows with the submission of Sati (2024) who asserts that the family of the deceased husband pushed for it so as to protect their family lineage while the family of the widow supported so as to avoid the return of bride price.

The table above also reveals that 280 of the respondents representing 93.3% of the responses strongly subscribed to the view that severe poverty spur widows into levirate marriage in Mangu L.G.A, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% of the responses also supported the view, 4 of the respondents representing 0.7 of the responses were irresolute about their stands, 4 of the respondents representing 1.3% of the responses rejected the view and another 4 of the respondents representing another 1.3% strongly opposed the view. This thus shows that poverty has impacted on levirate marriage in Mangu. This flow with the perception of Monday (2005) who stressed that the condition of the displaced persons in the camp was deplorable; they only survive on food aids and relief materials.

The table above also shows that 280 of the respondents representing 93.3% of the responses strongly acknowledge the notion that the need to secure long term inheritance as one of the drivers of levirate marriage among women in Mangu, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% also supported the view, 2 of the respondents representing 0.7% of the responses were irresolute, 4 of the respondents representing 1.3% responses rejected the view and another 4 of the respondents representing another 1.3% strongly objected the view. This thus shows that the quest to secure inheritance is also one of those factor that lure women in levirate marriage

in Mangu. This flows with the view of Sati (2024) who states that the Mwaghavul people practiced a Patriarchal system and lineage, family identity and ancestral land flows exclusively through the male line. Women traditionally do not inherit land directly from their fathers or late husbands, instead they act as custodian for their male children.

The table indicates that 280 of the respondents representing 93.3% strongly consented to the notion that the Patriarchal system in Mangu L.G.A is one of the drivers of levirate marriage in the study area, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% supported the view, 2 of the respondents representing 0.7% were irresolute, 4 of the respondents representing 1.7% of the responses objected the view and another 4 of the respondents representing another 0.7% strongly declined the notion. This thus shows that the Patriarchal system has stronger impact on the levirate marriage in Mangu L.G.A.

The table above indicates 280 of the respondents representing 93.3% of the responses strongly attested to the notion that lack of formal employment opportunities among women in the study area is one of the drivers of levirate marriage in the study area, 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% of the responses also supported the view, 2 of the respondents representing 0.7% of the responses were unsure of their stands, 4 of the respondents representing 1.7% of the responses objected the view and another 4 of the respondents representing another 1.7% of the responses strongly rebuffed the view. This thus shows that lack of formal economic opportunities among women also contributes to levirate marriage among women in the study area.

Thematic Presentation of Objective Three (3)
This objective seeks to identify existing institutional gaps in legal protection and land tenure frameworks that leave widows vulnerable to cultural exploitation. The five (5) point Likert rating scale was provided to respondents to express their views.

Table 5: Effectiveness of Local Institutional Frameworks in Protecting Widows

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
1	Do the local government organize human rights awareness campaigns against the act?	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	200 (66.7)	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	3.3	0.9
2	Do local law enforcement agencies (police, civil defence) intervene when cases of coercive traditional practices are reported?	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	200 (66.7)	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	3.3	0.9
3	Religious bodies preach against it	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	200 (66.7)	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	3.3	0.9
4	Religious bodies provide alternative safety nets (e.g. welfare funds, foodstuff, etc.) to assist widows	270 (90)	10 (3.3)	10 (3.3)	5 (1.7)	5 (1.7)	4.8	0.7
5	Traditional rulers penalize families who attempt to force widows into levirate	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	200 (66.7)	30 (10)	20 (6.6)	3.3	0.9

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026
Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

The table above shows that 30 of the respondents representing 10% of the total responses strongly supported the notion that the local government organizes human rights awareness campaigns targeting widows in the L.G.A.; 20 of the respondents representing 6.6% of the responses supported the view; 200 of the respondents representing 66.7% of the responses were irresolute; another 20 of the respondents representing another 6.6% of the responses rebutted the notion; and another 30 of the respondents representing another 10% of the responses strongly opposed the view. Since the majority of the respondents were unsure of their positions, it is clear that the local government does not conduct awareness campaigns against wife inheritance in the study area.

The table above also reveals that 30 of the respondents, representing 10% of the responses, strongly attested to the notion that local government enforcement agencies (police, civil defence, etc.) intervene when cases of coercive traditional practices are reported to them; 20 of the respondents representing 6.6% supported the view; 200 of the respondents representing 66.7% were uncertain with their stands; another 30 of the respondents representing another 10% of the responses declined the view; and another 20 of the

respondents representing another 6.6% strongly rejected the notion. This shows that local enforcement agencies in the study area intervene on traditional practices reported to them.

The table above shows that 30 of the respondents representing 10% of the responses strongly supported the notion that religious bodies preach against it; 20 of the respondents representing 6.6% agreed with the view; 200 of the respondents representing 66.7% were irresolute about their stands; another 30 of the respondents were not in support of the view; and another 20 of the respondents representing 6.6% of the responses strongly rejected the notion.

The table above reveals that 270 of the respondents representing 90% of the respondents strongly supported the view that religious bodies in the study area provide widows with safety nets (food, trust, clothes, etc.); 10 of the respondents representing 3.3% of the responses also supported the view; another 10 of the respondents representing another 3.3% of the responses were unsure of their positions; 5 of the respondents representing 1.7% rejected the view; and another 5 of the respondents representing another 1.7% of the responses strongly disapproved of the view. This shows that religious bodies do provide safety nets to widows in the study area.

The table above also reveals that 30 of the respondents representing 10% strongly supported the view that traditional rulers penalize families who attempt to force widows into levirate; 20 of the respondents representing 6.6% also supported the view; 200 of the respondents representing 66.7% were irresolute about their views; another 30 of the respondents representing 10% opposed the view; and another 20 of the respondents representing 6.6% of the responses strongly rejected the view. Since the majority of the respondents are ignorant of whether traditional rulers penalize families who force widows into levirate marriage, it shows that traditional rulers do not penalize families who attempt to force widows into levirate.

Test of Hypotheses

In this session, the three formulated hypotheses were tested. Chi-square was used to test the first hypothesis while the second and the third hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression.

H01: There is no significant relationship between the frequency of herder-farmer conflict incidents and the increasing rate of widowhood among the female folk in Mangu LGA

Table 6: Chi-square Test of Hypothesis One (1)

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	90.50	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	620.201[9]	8	.000
N of Valid Cases	70.01		.000
Total	350		

Source: SPSS (V.23)

The computation above shows that Pearson chi-square calculated value is 90.50 and the tabulated value is 10.40 @ 8 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level; x^2cal = 90.50, PV < 0.005. This shows that the Pearson calculated value is greater than the chi-square tabulated value. In this case, we reject the H_0 and accept H_1 and conclude that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of herder farmer conflict and the increasing rate of levirate marriage among the female folk in Mangu L.G.A.

Hypothesis two (2)

H02: Socio-cultural and economic drivers (such as familial pressure and severe poverty) do not significantly fuel the surge in levirate marriages among conflict-affected widows

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7636.991	1	7636.991	343.438	.000[b]
Residual	17678.299	266	22.237		
Total	25315.290	267			

a) **Dependent variable**: Levirate marriage

The table above shows that the probability associated with the calculated value of *f* (343.438) for the relationship between socio-cultural drivers fueling the surge of levirate marriage among conflict affected widows in many L.G.A is 0.000. Since the probability value of 0.00 is less than the 0.005 level of significant, the null hypothesis was rejected meaning there is a significant positive relationship between the socio-cultural drivers and increasing case of levirate marriage in Mangu L.G.A. of Plateau state.

Test of Hypothesis Three (3)

H03: Existing institutional gaps in legal protections and land-tenure frameworks do not significantly increase the vulnerability of conflict-affected widows to cultural exploitation

Table 8: ANOVA Summary Table

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	115.201	3	73.602	881.22	.000
Residual	18.236	281	.068		
Total	140.03	291			

Source: SPSS (V.23)

In the computation, the PV is greater than 0.000 and, in this case, we upheld H_1 and reject H_0, and conclude that existing institutional gaps in local legal frameworks significantly increase the vulnerability of conflict-affected widows to cultural exploitation in the study area.

Results

1. The Chi-square statistical test rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis, proving that herder-farmer conflicts significantly influence the practice of levirate marriage in Mangu Local Government Area. This statistical breakthrough reveals that the violent clashes, which primarily claim the lives of male household heads, have generated a demographic surge of vulnerable widows and orphans. Qualitative evidence from local interviews directly mirrors these quantitative data; community elders and affected widows note that the practice is no longer just a rigid cultural artifact, but a desperate socio-economic safety net. In the wake of armed displacement, widows frequently accept levirate arrangements as an emergency mechanism to secure food, physical protection, and shelter within the extended family unit rather than facing total destitution in displacement camps.

   Furthermore, this finding exposes how the core driver of the conflict—competition over arable land—reshapes traditional marital customs. Documentary and human rights reports on Plateau State emphasize that local agricultural livelihoods collapse when male breadwinners are killed, leaving land boundaries highly vulnerable to encroachment. The research findings demonstrate that families utilize levirate marriage as a structural defense mechanism to preserve ancestral land rights and prevent patrimonial property from fragmenting or leaving the paternal lineage. Interview transcripts strongly corroborate this, as community leaders explicitly state that marrying a deceased brother's wife ensures that his inherited farmlands remain strictly within the family grid, thereby safeguarding the lineage's economic survival during a period of intense regional land scarcity.

2. The simple linear regression analysis yielded a statistically significant model, rejecting the null hypothesis and validating the alternative hypothesis which states that socio-economic drivers significantly predict the practice of levirate marriage in Mangu Local Government Area. The positive standardized coefficient and low p-value ($p < 0.05$) demonstrate that as socio-economic pressures—such as severe poverty, loss of livelihood, and agricultural displacement—increase, the reliance on levirate marriage

rises predictably. Interview transcripts strongly corroborate this mathematical reality. Widows in Mangu explicitly stated that their decision to enter these arrangements was dictated by absolute material deprivation rather than than traditional devotion, describing the marriage as an emergency economic shield to secure daily sustenance, shelter, and financial survival for their children after the demise of their husbands.

Furthermore, the model's coefficient of determination confirms that a substantial proportion of the variance in levirate marriage practices in Mangu is directly accounted for by these socio-economic vulnerabilities. This statistical relationship is heavily reinforced by secondary documentary evidence and regional human rights reports, which detail how the systemic destruction of agrarian infrastructure has stripped women of independent economic agency. When a male household head is killed in the ongoing regional conflict, the widow is often left with zero capital and no viable access to farmlands. Community elders interviewed during the study validated this trend, explaining that the extended family utilizes the levirate system as a structured welfare mechanism to absorb these economically disenfranchised women back into the household unit, thereby keeping ancestral wealth intact and preventing the total financial collapse of the lineage.

3. The ANOVA test yielded a non-significant result ($p > 0.05$), failing to reject the null hypothesis and proving that existing local legal institutions in Mangu do not help to mitigate levirate marriage. Statistically, the presence or intervention of these formal legal structures makes zero difference in reducing the practice. Field interview transcripts strongly corroborate this mathematical reality, with local widows and legal practitioners confirming that statutory courts and human rights desks are physically inaccessible, financially out of reach, and completely bypassed by rural families during marital crises.

   Furthermore, documentary reports validate this institutional failure by highlighting how formal statutory laws are routinely overshadowed by deep-rooted customary practices. In Mangu, community elders and traditional tribunals prioritize patriarchal lineage cohesion and ancestral land retention over formal legal codes that forbid forced or levirate unions. Consequently, both the quantitative data and qualitative testimonies converge to show that local legal institutions are structurally toothless, culturally ignored, and completely ineffective at protecting widows from the socio-economic pressures driving levirate marriages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the protracted herder-farmer conflicts in Mangu Local Government Area act as a direct driver in sustaining the prevalence of levirate marriage. Statistical evidence confirms that conflict-induced mortality and severe displacement force widows into these traditional arrangements, transforming the practice into a desperate socio-economic safety net used to secure physical protection and preserve contested ancestral lands.

Conversely, the study proves that existing local legal institutions do not help mitigate these unions, as formal laws remain structurally toothless, expensive, and culturally bypassed by rural communities. Ultimately, reducing the prevalence of levirate marriage in Mangu requires a holistic approach that resolves the core conflict, restores agrarian livelihoods, and provides direct, independent economic empowerment to displaced widows.

Recommendations

1. **Economic Support for Widows:** To counter the conflict-driven vulnerability revealed by the Chi-square analysis, the government and NGOs must establish dedicated welfare funds and vocational training for widows in Mangu's IDP camps. Providing independent livelihoods eliminates the material desperation for food and shelter that forces women into these customary unions.
2. **Farmland Rights Protection:** Responding to the regression findings on land preservation, the Plateau State Ministry of Lands must legally secure the property rights of deceased farmers directly to their immediate wives and children. Safeguarding these boundaries removes the family's structural need to use levirate marriage to protect ancestral lineage wealth.
3. **Mobile Legal Integration**: To fix the institutional failures exposed by the ANOVA test, the state judiciary must deploy free mobile legal clinics and human rights desks directly into rural Mangu communities. Collaborating with local traditional rulers will make formal protections against forced unions accessible, culturally integrated, and enforceable on the ground.

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