

LAWS OF GHANA



MATRIMONIAL CAUSES ACT, 1971 ACT 367

ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

PART ONE

Divorce

1. Petition for divorce.
2. Proof of breakdown of marriage.
3. Adultery of respondent.
4. Unreasonable behaviour of respondent.
5. Desertion of respondent.
6. Consent of respondent.
7. Failure of parties to live as husband and wife.
8. Promotion of reconciliation.
9. Restriction on petitions within two years of marriage.
10. Petitioner's conduct no bar to divorce.

11. Respondent entitled to divorce without cross-petition.

12. Alleged adulterer may be joined.

PART TWO

Other Matrimonial Causes

13. Nullity.

14. Children of annulled marriages.

15. Presumption of death and dissolution of marriage.

16. Neglect to maintain spouse or child.

17. Unreasonable conduct towards spouse or child.

PART THREE

Financial Provision, Child Custody and Other Relief

18. General powers.

19. Financial provision for spouse.

20. Property settlement.

21. Conveyance of title.

22. Custody and financial provision for children.

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23. Security for payment.
24. Payment of costs.
25. Orders of restraint.
26. Orders relating to assets.
27. Modification of financial provision, custody and support.
28. Financial provision to cease on re-marriage or death.
29. Orders terminating on child reaching majority.
30. Failure to comply with order to make financial provision.

PART FOUR

Jurisdiction

31. General matrimonial jurisdiction.
32. Domicile of married women.
33. Additional jurisdiction relating to financial provision.
34. Additional jurisdiction relating to child custody.
35. Choice of law.
36. Recognition of foreign decrees.

PART FIVE

Miscellaneous and Supplementary

37. Decrees to be final.
38. Bequest to divorced spouse to be invalid.

39. Privacy of proceedings.
40. Transfer of undefended actions.
41. Application of this Act.
42. Abolition of right to claim restitution of conjugal rights.
43. Interpretation.
44. Enactments ceasing to have effect.

ACT 367

MATRIMONIAL CAUSES ACT, 1971(1)

AN ACT to provide for matrimonial causes and for other matters connected therewith.

PART ONE

Divorce

1. Petition for divorce

(1) A petition for divorce may be presented to the Court by either party to a marriage.

(2) The sole ground for granting a petition for divorce shall be that the marriage has broken down

beyond reconciliation.

2. Proof of breakdown of marriage

(1) For the purpose of showing that the marriage has broken down beyond reconciliation the

petitioner shall satisfy the Court of one or more of the following facts:

(a) that the respondent has committed adultery and that by reason of the adultery the petitioner

finds it intolerable to live with the respondent;

(b) that the respondent has behaved in a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to

live with the respondent;

(c) that the respondent has deserted the petitioner for a continuous period of at least two years

immediately preceding the presentation of the petition;

(d) that the parties to the marriage have not lived as husband and wife for a continuous period of

at least two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition and the respondent

consents to the grant of a decree of divorce, provided that the consent shall not be

unreasonably withheld, and where the Court is satisfied that it has been so withheld, the

Court may grant a petition for divorce under this paragraph despite the refusal;

(e) that the parties to the marriage have not lived as husband and wife for a continuous period of

at least five years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition; or

(f) that the parties to the marriage have, after diligent effort, been unable to reconcile their

differences.

(2) On a petition for divorce the Court shall inquire, so far as is reasonable, into the facts alleged by

the petitioner and the respondent.

(3) Although the Court finds the existence of one or more of the facts specified in subsection (1), the

Court shall not grant a petition for divorce unless it is satisfied, on all the evidence,

that the marriage has
broken down beyond reconciliation.

3. Adultery of respondent

Where with a view to reconciliation, the parties to the marriage have lived with each other as husband

and wife for a period or periods after it became known to the petitioner that the respondent had, since the

celebration of the marriage, committed adultery, then

(a) if the length of that period or of those periods together was six months or less, their living

with each other as husband and wife during that period or those periods shall be disregarded

in determining whether for the purposes of section 2 (1) (a) the petitioner finds it intolerable

to live with the respondent; but

(b) if the length of that period or of those periods together exceeded six months, the petitioner

shall not be entitled to rely on that adultery for the purposes of section 2 (1) (a).

4. Unreasonable behaviour of respondent

For the purposes of section 2 (1) (b), in determining whether the petitioner cannot reasonably be

expected to live with the respondent, the Court shall disregard any period or periods not exceeding six

months in the aggregate during which the parties to the marriage lived with each other as husband and

wife after the date of the occurrence of the final incident relied on by the petitioner and

proved to the

Court in support of his allegation.

5. Desertion of respondent

(1) For the purposes of section 2 (1) (c), in determining whether the period for which the respondent

has deserted the petitioner has been continuous, the Court shall disregard any period or periods not

exceeding six months in the aggregate during which the parties resumed living as man and wife.

(2) For the purposes of section 2 (1) (c) the Court may treat a period of desertion as having continued

at a time when the deserting party was incapable of continuing the necessary intention if the evidence

before the Court is such that, had that party not been so incapable, the Court would have inferred that the

desertion continued at that time.

6. Consent of respondent

(1) For the purposes of section 2 (1) (d) the Court shall be satisfied that a consent to divorce has been

given by the respondent only after the respondent has been given the information that will enable the

other party to understand the consequences of the consent.

(2) Where the only fact specified in section 2 on which the petitioner relies in support of the petition

is that mentioned in section 2 (1) (d), the Court may, on application by the respondent at any time before

the decree is made, dismiss the proceedings if it is satisfied that the petitioner misled the respondent,

intentionally or unintentionally, about a matter which the respondent took into account

in deciding to

consent to the grant of a decree.

7. Failure of parties to live as husband and wife

For the purposes of section 2 (1) (d) and (e), in determining whether the period for which the parties to

a marriage have not lived as husband and wife has been continuous, the Court shall disregard any period

or periods not exceeding six months in the aggregate during which the parties resumed living as husband

and wife.

8. Promotion of reconciliation

(1) On the hearing of a petition for divorce, the petitioner or counsel for the petitioner shall inform the

Court of all efforts made by or on behalf of the petitioner, both before and after the commencement of the

proceedings, to effect a reconciliation.

(2) If at any stage of the proceedings for divorce it appears to the Court that there is a reasonable

possibility of reconciliation, the Court may adjourn the proceedings for a reasonable time to enable

attempts to be made to effect a reconciliation, and may direct that the parties to the marriage, together

with representatives of their families or any conciliator appointed by the Court and mutually agreeable to

the parties, attempt to effect a reconciliation.

(3) When proceedings are resumed after an adjournment under subsection (2), the conciliator, or if a

conciliator has not been appointed, counsel for the petitioner, shall make a report to the Court of the result

of the adjournment, and the report shall be limited to a statement that the parties have been reconciled or

have not been reconciled or that more time is needed to effect a reconciliation.

(4) Evidence of statements or other actions of the parties or their representatives in connection with

attempts at reconciliation under subsection (2) shall not be admissible in Court in the divorce

proceedings.

9. Restriction on petitions within two years of marriage

(1) Subject to subsection (2), a petition for divorce shall not be presented to the Court within two

years from the date of the marriage.

(2) The Court may, on application, allow the presentation of a petition for divorce within two years

from the date of the marriage on the ground of substantial hardship suffered by the petitioner or depravity

on the part of the respondent.

(3) In determining the application under subsection (2) the Court shall consider the interest of any

child of the household and to the question whether there is a reasonable possibility of reconciliation

between the parties.

(4) If it appears to the Court that leave under subsection (2) was obtained by the petitioner by a

misrepresentation or concealment of the nature of the case, the Court may dismiss the petition, without

prejudice to any petition which may be brought after the expiration of the period of two years from the

date of that marriage on the same, or substantially the same, facts as those proved in support of the

dismissed petition.

(5) This section shall not be deemed to prohibit the presentation of a petition based on matters which

occurred within two years from the date of the marriage.

10. Petitioner's conduct no bar to divorce

Without prejudice to a provision of this Act which empowers or requires the Court to dismiss a

petition for divorce, nothing in an enactment or a rule of law shall be taken as empowering or requiring

the Court to dismiss a petition on the ground of collusion between the parties in connection with the

presentation or prosecution of the petition or on the ground of any conduct on the part of the petitioner.

11. Respondent entitled to divorce without cross-petition

If in the proceedings for divorce the respondent alleges against the petitioner and proves the facts

required by sections 1 (2) and 2 (1), the Court may in those proceedings give to the respondent the relief

to which the respondent would have been entitled if the respondent had presented a separate petition

seeking that relief.

12. Alleged adulterer may be joined

On a petition for divorce in which adultery is alleged, the person alleged to have committed adultery

with the party to the marriage may be, but need not be, made a party to the proceedings.

PART TWO

Other Matrimonial Causes

13. Nullity

(1) A person may present a petition to the Court for a decree of nullity for annulling the marriage on

the ground that it is by law void or voidable.

(2) In addition to any other grounds on which a marriage is by law void or voidable, a marriage is

voidable, subject to subsection (3), on the ground

(a) that the marriage has not been consummated owing to the wilful refusal of the respondent to

consummate it; or

(b) that at the time of the marriage either party to the marriage was of unsound mind or subject

to recurrent attacks of insanity; or

(c) that the respondent was at the time of the marriage pregnant by some person other than the

petitioner; or

(d) that the respondent was at the time of the marriage suffering from an incurable venereal

disease in a communicable form.

(3) The Court shall not grant a decree of nullity in a case falling within paragraph (b),

(c) or (d) of

subsection (2) unless it is satisfied that

(a) the petitioner was at the time of the marriage ignorant of the facts making the marriage

voidable; and

(b) proceedings were instituted within a year from the date of the marriage; and

(c) marital intercourse with the consent of the petitioner has not taken place since the petitioner

discovered the existence of the facts making the marriage voidable.

(4) Nothing in this section shall be construed as validating a marriage which is by law void but with

respect to which a decree of nullity has not been granted.

14. Children of annulled marriages

Where a decree of nullity is granted, a child of the parties to the decree shall be deemed to have the

same status and rights as if the marriage of the parents had been dissolved rather than annulled.

15. Presumption of death and dissolution of marriage

(1) A married person may present a petition to the Court to have it presumed that the other party to the

marriage is dead and to have the marriage dissolved.

(2) The Court may, if it is satisfied that reasonable grounds for the application of the presumption

exist, make a decree of presumption of death and dissolution of marriage.

(3) In proceedings under this section, the fact that for a period of seven years or more the other party

to the marriage has been continually absent from the petitioner and the petitioner has no reason to believe

that the other party has been living within that time shall be evidence that the other party is dead until the

contrary is proved.

16. Neglect to maintain spouse or child

(1) Either party to a marriage may petition the Court for an order for maintenance on the ground that

the other party to the marriage has willfully neglected to provide, or to make a proper contribution

towards, reasonable maintenance for the petitioner or a child of the household.

(2) A wife shall not be deemed to have willfully neglected her husband unless the Court is satisfied

that, in all the circumstances, it is reasonable to expect the wife to provide or contribute towards

maintenance for her husband, and for the purpose of so satisfying itself the Court shall consider

(a) an impairment of the husband's earning capacity, whether through age, illness, disability or

otherwise,

(b) the resources of the husband,

(c) the earning capacity and the resources of the wife, and

(d) any other circumstances relating to the financial position of the parties.

(3) A respondent shall not be deemed to have willfully neglected a child of the household where that

child is not the natural or adopted child of the respondent unless the Court is satisfied in all the

circumstances that it is reasonable to expect the respondent to provide or contribute

towards maintenance

for that child of the household, and for the purpose of so satisfying itself, the Court shall consider

(a) whether the respondent had assumed any responsibility for the child's maintenance, and if

so, the extent, duration and basis of that assumed responsibility; and

(b) whether a person other than the respondent is responsible for the maintenance of the child,

and if so, the extent to which that party is maintaining, or might be able to maintain, the

child; and

(c) any other circumstances relating to the relationship between the respondent and the child.

17. Unreasonable conduct towards spouse or child

Either party to a marriage may petition the Court for a child custody order on the ground that the other

party to the marriage has persistently behaved in an unreasonable manner towards either the petitioner or

a child of the household.

PART THREE

Financial Provision, Child Custody and Other Relief

18. General powers

In proceedings under this Act, the Court may exercise any of the powers specified in this Part.

19. Financial provision for spouse

The Court may, whenever it thinks just and equitable, award maintenance pending suit or financial

provision to either party to the marriage, but an order for maintenance pending suit or financial provision

shall not be made until the Court has considered the standard of living of the parties and their

circumstances.

20. Property settlement

(1) The Court may order either party to the marriage to pay to the other party a sum of money or

convey to the other party movable or immovable property as settlement of property rights or in lieu

thereof or as part of financial provision that the Court thinks just and equitable.

(2) Payments and conveyances under this section may be ordered to be made in gross or by

instalments.

21. Conveyance of title

(1) When a decree of divorce or nullity is granted, if the Court is satisfied that either party to the

marriage holds title to movable or immovable property part or all of which rightfully belongs to the other,

the Court shall order transfer or conveyance of the interest to the party entitled to it on the terms that the

Court thinks just and equitable.

(2) When a transfer or conveyance of movable or immovable property is ordered by

the Court and the

party ordered to make the transfer or conveyance is either unable or unwilling to do so, the Court may

order the registrar of the Court to execute the appropriate transfer or conveyance on the part of that party.

22. Custody and financial provision for children

(1) In proceedings under this Act, the Court shall inquire whether there are any children of the

household.

(2) The Court may, either on its own initiative or on application by a party to proceedings under this

Act, make an order concerning a child of the household which it thinks reasonable and for the benefit of

the child.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (2), an order under that subsection may

(a) award custody of the child to any person;

(b) regulate the right of access of any person to the child;

(c) provide for the education and maintenance of the child out of the property or income of

either or both of the parties to the marriage.

23. Security for payment

Where the Court has reason to believe that a party ordered to make a payment or payments may be

unwilling or unlikely to pay, the Court may order that party to give reasonable security for any payment

or payments ordered.

24. Payment of costs

At any time after the commencement of the proceedings, the Court may require either party to the

marriage to pay to the other party the sum or sums of money that is, or are reasonable to enable that party

to maintain or defend the suit.

25. Orders of restraint

(1) The Court may by order restrain

(a) either party to the marriage from leaving the jurisdiction until the Court is satisfied that that

party has made adequate provision to satisfy an award the Court has made or may make in

the proceedings;

(b) a person from removing a child of the household from the jurisdiction;

(c) a party to the marriage from imposing a restraint on the personal liberty of, or from harming

or interfering with, the other party to the marriage or a child of the household, for as long as

it thinks necessary.

(2) The Court may order a person to return a child of the household to the jurisdiction.

26. Orders relating to assets

(1) The Court may by order restrain either party to the marriage, or any other person, from permitting

the disposition of the assets or property of either party to the marriage, and the Court may rescind a

disposition of the assets or property that has been made with the intention of defeating the financial

provision or property settlement of the other party, except that a disposition for value to a purchaser in

good faith may not be rescinded.

(2) The Court may make an order concerning the property or assets of either party to the marriage or

of a child of the household that is appropriate to preserve or maintain that asset or property while the suit

is pending before the Court.

27. Modification of financial provision, custody and support

(1) Subject to subsection (2), the Court may from time to time rescind or vary an order in respect of

maintenance pending suit and financial provision, or the care, custody and support of a child, as it thinks

fit.

(2) An order of financial provision for a party to the marriage shall not be made subsequent to a

decree of divorce or nullity in any case in which

(a) the decree contains an express waiver of financial provision; or

(b) the decree provides for a money or property settlement in lieu of financial provision and that

settlement has been executed; or

(c) the decree does not grant liberty to apply for financial provision in the future.

28. Financial provision to cease on remarriage or death

(1) A party to the marriage is not entitled to financial provision for that party in respect of any period

after the remarriage of that party.

(2) The death of a party for whose benefit an order for financial provision has been made, or the death

of the party adversely affected by the order, shall automatically terminate the order.

(3) The provisions of this section shall be without prejudice to the right of a party ordered to make

financial provision to apply to the Court under section 27 (1), at any time subsequent to the order, to

rescind or vary the order for a sufficient cause.

29. Orders terminating on child reaching majority

An order for care, custody or support of a child shall automatically terminate when the child reaches

the age of twenty-one years, unless the order provides otherwise with a view to making reasonable

provision for the further education of the child, or for the care, custody and support of the child who is so

incapacitated that the child cannot be expected to care for himself or herself.

30. Failure to comply with order to make financial provision

Failure to comply with an order of the Court to make financial provision under this Act for a spouse or

child shall, in addition to any other effect it might have, be deemed to commence a period of desertion by

the party to the marriage who has failed to comply with the order.

PART FOUR

Jurisdiction

31. General matrimonial jurisdiction

The Court shall have jurisdiction in proceedings under this Act where either party to the marriage

(a) is a citizen, or

(b) is domiciled in Ghana, or

(c) has been ordinarily resident in Ghana for at least three years immediately preceding the

commencement of the proceedings.

32. Domicile of married women

For the sole purpose of determining jurisdiction under this Act, the domicile of a married woman shall

be determined as if the woman was above the age of twenty-one and not married.

33. Additional jurisdiction relating to financial provision

In addition to any other jurisdiction conferred by this Act the Court shall have jurisdiction, where a

party who may be ordered to make financial provision has assets in Ghana, to order that party to make

financial provision not exceeding the value of those assets.

34. Additional jurisdiction relating to child custody

In addition to any other jurisdiction conferred by this Act, the Court shall have jurisdiction to make

child custody arrangements whenever the child whose custody is in question is present in Ghana.

35. Choice of law

In proceedings under this Act, except in proceedings for a decree of nullity of a void

marriage, the

issues shall be determined as if both parties to the marriage were domiciled in Ghana at the

commencement of the proceedings.

36. Recognition of foreign decrees

The Court shall recognise as valid a decree of divorce, nullity, or presumption of death and dissolution

of marriage, obtained by judicial process or otherwise, which is not contrary to natural justice, and which

(a) has been granted by a tribunal which had a significant and substantial connection with the

parties to the marriage; or

(b) is in accordance with the law of the place where both parties to the marriage were ordinarily

resident at the time of the action dissolving or annulling the marriage.

PART FIVE

Miscellaneous and Supplementary

37. Decrees to be final

Every decree of divorce, nullity and presumption of death and dissolution of marriage under this Act

shall take effect from the date on which the Court gave judgment.

38. Bequest to divorced spouse to be invalid

A gift to or an appointment in favour of one spouse in the will of the other shall be invalidated if the

marriage has been terminated under this Act by divorce or annulment, unless the will contains an express

provision to the contrary.

39. Privacy of proceedings

The Court may direct that proceedings under this Act be heard in private and may exclude all persons

except officers of the Court, the parties and their witnesses and lawyers where the Court is satisfied that

the interests of the parties or the children of the household so require.

40. Transfer of undefended actions

The Chief Justice may by writing personally signed by the Chief Justice transfer an undefended action

under this Act from the High Court or a Circuit Court to a District Court, and that Court shall have

jurisdiction.

41. Application of this Act

(1) This Act shall apply to all monogamous marriages.

(2) On application by a party to a marriage other than a monogamous marriage, the Court shall apply

the provisions of this Act to that marriage, and in so doing, subject to the requirements of justice, equity

and good conscience, the Court may

(a) consider the peculiar incidents of that marriage in determining appropriate relief, financial

provision and child custody arrangements;

(b) grant any form of relief recognised by the personal law of the parties to the proceedings, in

addition to or in substitution for the matrimonial reliefs afforded by this Act.

(3) In the application of section 2 (1) to a marriage other than a monogamous marriage, the Court

shall consider the facts recognised by the personal law of the parties as sufficient to justify a divorce,

including in the case of a customary law marriage, but without prejudice to the foregoing, the following:

(a) wilful neglect to maintain a wife or child;

(b) impotence;

(c) barrenness or sterility;

(d) intercourse prohibited under that personal law on account of consanguinity, affinity or other

relationship; and

(e) persistent false allegations of infidelity by one spouse against another:

(4) Subsection (3) shall have effect subject to the requirements of justice, equity and good conscience.

(5) In the application of this Act to a marriage under customary law, the words "child of the

household" shall be construed as including a child recognised under customary law as a child of the

parties.

42. Abolition of right to claim restitution of conjugal rights

After the commencement of this Act a person shall not petition the Court for restitution of conjugal rights.

43. Interpretation

In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,

“adultery” means the voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with one of the opposite

sex other than his or her spouse;

“child of the household” means a child, whether the natural or adopted child of both or either of

the parties, or any other child who is treated by both parties as a permanent member of their

household;

“citizen” means a citizen of Ghana;

“Court” means, subject to section 40, the High Court or a Circuit Court;

“financial provision” includes maintenance and all other forms of financial support provided by

one spouse to the other or to a child of the household;

“maintenance pending suit” includes all forms of financial support provided by one spouse to the

other or to a child of the household from the commencement to the determination of the proceedings;

“marriage” except as otherwise provided in section 41, means a monogamous marriage;

“monogamous marriage” does not include a potentially polygamous marriage.

44. Enactments ceasing to have effect

(1) An English Statute relating to matrimonial causes which was in force in Ghana immediately

before the commencement of this Act shall cease to apply.

(2) This Act shall not apply to proceedings commenced before the coming into force of this Act, and

accordingly, despite subsection (1) of this section, the proceedings may be continued and determined after

the commencement of this Act in accordance with the law in force immediately before the

commencement.

Endnotes

1 (Popup - Footnote)

1. The Act was assented to on 7th September, 1971.