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An Immigrant Wife's Place? In the Home, According to Visa Policy

June 19, 2013 by [Pallavi Banerjee](#) | [21 Comments](#)



Do most of us still live in a 1950 nuclear family where dad goes off to work and mom stays home to take care of the family? Not in real life. But that lifestyle is enshrined in the United States' dependent visa policies. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the *Leave it to Beaver* way of life is the only way skilled workers' migrant families ought to live.

It all begins with one simple fact. There is a [shortage of high-tech workers in the United States](#). We don't produce enough computer engineers, analysts, programmers, engineers, and doctors, to meet the country's needs. The United States tries to solve this problem by allowing U.S. businesses to hire high-tech workers from other countries by granting [H1-B non-immigrant visas](#) to individuals from other countries seeking temporary work in "specialty occupations."

These visas allow a U.S. company to employ a foreign individual for up to six years with the possibility of permanent residency. To further entice migrant high-skilled workers to leave their homeland and come to the U.S., they offer H4 dependent visas to their spouses and children. In 2010, from India alone, [138,431 high-skilled Indian immigrants and the 55,335 Indian immigrants on H-4 dependent visas](#).

[But the "dependent visa" puts many restrictions on the spouses, usually women, of the skilled workers who have an H1-B visa. The dependent visa holder is not allowed to work for pay until the lead migrant has gained permanent residency in the U.S., a process that can take six years or more. In some states, the dependent visa holders are not even allowed to drive.](#)

[When I studied families with an H1-B/H-4 dichotomy I found that most adult recipients of the H-4 dependent visas are highly qualified women. They experienced a loss of dignity and self-deprecation. Some women told me they felt they were thrown back into a model of the "traditional family" where women are not valued at all outside of the home. They talked about being rendered invisible, feeling lost, and for some, suicidal.](#)

[One of my study informants described her H-4 visa as a "vegetable visa meant to make you vegetate." Others called it a "prison" or "bondage" visa. Another woman told me "You lose your individuality and in time all your confidence – and one day suddenly you realize you are just reduced to being a visa number in your head. It is scary – it's like losing your head."](#)

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Gaining permanent residency in the U.S., which would allow spousal employment, could take many years for H1-B workers. This means these women will be legally unable to work for years on end. Some of the women I spoke to simply could not handle their situation and decided to return to India. One high-tech worker who recently went through divorce told me, "we had absolutely no problem as a couple, it's this visa situation...she was unhappy and depressed and it was not going to get better. We had to take the very hard and cruel way out – the many pains of being a foreign worker."

As the U.S. debates [Comprehensive Immigration Reform](#), and considers increasing the number of "high skilled foreign workers", lawmakers should reconsider the constraints on spouses embedded within dependent visas.

Immigration policies designed to bring high-skilled workers and their dependents to the U.S. fill a need in the high-tech industry, but they fall short in building gender equal, stable, happy, and viable families. The 1950s are long gone. It is time to let wives work. Why force migrant families to live in the past?

Photo courtesy of [Work and Travel USA](#) via [Creative Commons 2.0](#).

21 Comments

Comments



Lisa Cheby says:

June 19, 2013 at 1:59 pm

I am curious if any of the H1-B's were granted to women and H-4s were given to their husbands? Also, have any of the women in H-4s applied for the H1-B and been denied? I am not implying that this would any more acceptable if men were also in the same situation as spouses and I am not implying the women are not put in an unjust situation. I am just curious as these two scenarios were not addressed in the article.

[Reply](#)



JJ says:

July 21, 2013 at 11:51 pm

Hi, Lisa. There are certainly situations where the husband is the H-4. As for why H-4s do not apply for H1-B themselves, I think some of them applied and then did not win the lottery. Some worked hard, contributed to the country, paid tax and then maxed out their work visa limit of 6 years. My company tried to file PERM for me twice but I could not pass the recruitment stage because we are a big company and the PERM minimal requirements could not be customized for me. They have to apply for everyone that holds my position across the country. People that my company would never never hire could qualify for my job based on paper. However, I can't choose to leave whenever I want to. I have a family here, my husband and my children.

[Reply](#)



maber says:

June 19, 2013 at 2:46 pm

Seriously?! First off, there is not in reality a shortage of skilled workers. There are countless college grads drowning in debt while either unemployed, underemployed, or working for free as interns. The fact that this many workers are being brought in is a major issue to begin with. (Unless for instance, you're the ONLY guy that knows how to cure cancer or something.) Now we're supposed to hand over American jobs to their spouses as well, because their feelings are hurt?!

It sounds like something written by a big business lobbyist to create a faux feminist issue.

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ImmigrationProf Blog

Wednesday, September 18, 2013

H4 visa, a curse - by Rashi Bhatnagar

By Immigration Prof

H4 visa, a curse - by Rashi Bhatnagar Writer hails from India.

She has been residing in the US legally for the last four years on H4 visa. She has a support group on Facebook 'H4 visa, a curse' which has members from all over the US and who come from countries all around the globe.

Come October every year, many companies open their gates for newly hired H1B workers, but no attention is given to their families in the US especially the spouses. Majority of them are women folk who follow their highly skilled husbands – doctors, engineers, researchers, scientists. Most of these women are young, well educated, English speaking, full of innovative ideas, ambitious but they are denied right to work, SSN and a long wait (10 – 20 years due to the current retrogression on the visa dates). They can be an asset to the US economy by establishing their own businesses, creating jobs, reducing out sourcing and filling up the demand of high skilled workers. It will give all of us a high purchasing power as well.

US is considered as a land of innovation and opportunities. In order to curb the shortage of high skilled workers in the US, H1B visas are granted to the citizens of other countries for the same. Though H4 visa holders can convert their dependent visas to H1B visas but it has become impossible these days. Five years back, Nikki T, a member of 'H4 visa, a curse' group on Facebook, used to work in India with a reputed US based company as a software professional. She got married to a person who was already working in US on H1B Visa. She arrived in US on a dependent visa. Her previous employer in India (US based) was based out of the same city in US where she arrived. She was excited to know that she falls under highly skilled force. In spite of getting lot of job offers from other companies, trying out for a job in the same company, she was disappointed to know that nobody is ready to sponsor a work visa for her. She didn't lose hope. In spite of having Engineering and a Master's degree in Management and ample work experience, she enrolled in a reputed state university for a Master's program. After two years with a successful on job training she could not find an employer who could sponsor her H1B visa. It has only added an unnecessary debt, frustration and disappointment. Her co-workers back home are still working and growing with the same company.

H4 visa dependent kids who are brought as babies legally to the US are forced to go back to their origin countries after attaining 21 years of age because due to the long wait Green Card wait. At the same time passing of the DACA rule has given work permits to the eligible kids of illegal workers in the US.

This problem is not limited to women and kids. Many legal, dependent males are also getting affected by this as well.

Nikki's husband supports her financially well, but not many of the H4 spouses get lucky with supportive spouses like Nikki. Due to financial dependence, no identity, little awareness, and no support, these women become victims of severe domestic violence and abuse. There is no specific information about H4 visa protection laws, conditions, and work permit problems on any official US immigration websites. Sometimes it becomes very easy for the masses to comment "You know about this visa before coming to the US".

A person on L1 Visa comes to US and performs similar job duties as an H1B worker performs. But the dependents of L1 Visa holders are immediately eligible for a work permit (EAD), but not the dependents of H1B workers. This difference of treatment does not find any justification in any of the available rules and documents.

Though nobody can give back our lost time, aspirations and dreams, we hope that Immigration Reform will amend the age old laws so that the new aspirants will not suffer like many H4 visa dependents.

(Group member name has been changed due to privacy concern)

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<http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/immigration/2013/09/h4-visa-a-curse-by-rashi-bhatnagar-...>

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October 28, 2013

Beyond Borders

A little-known piece of immigration legislation is leaving the futures of thousands of women hanging in the balance.

By Kayla Webley

27

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Special Offer

While Congress bickers over whether to include a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in the pending immigration overhaul, many immigrant women who are here legally are waiting for legislators to take action on a much less controversial piece of the reform package. One of those women is Audrey Belliard Smit, 31, a French citizen who met her Danish husband in Ireland in 2007 when they were at roughly the same place in their advertising careers. A few years later, her husband started a new job in New York City.

He was granted an H1B visa—the type given to highly skilled workers whose expertise is in demand in the U.S. But despite years of work experience at Microsoft and AOL, without a sponsor of her own, Belliard Smit was given an H4 visa—the type commonly awarded to dependents of H1B holders—and told she was not allowed to work. "It was a shock," she says. "I was very career-driven; professional success has always been a big thing for me." Sure, the time at home with the couple's two young daughters has been nice, but after being out of the workforce for three years, Belliard Smit is eager to get back in. "When I look at how my husband's career has progressed, that's when it

really hits me," she says. "I can't help but think, when will I get to move forward with my career, too?"

Belliard Smit is one of hundreds of thousands of spouses, primarily women, who are allowed to live in the U.S. with their spouses but not allowed to have a job. In essence, they're forced into a situation of dependency, which can cause a strain on their marriages, rather than being able to contribute to both their family's income and the economy. These women are often just as well-educated as their partners, but they're treated unequally. "It's inhumane," says Vivek Wadhwa, an immigration researcher at Stanford University. "What sort of country is this that brings people in but doesn't give them equal rights?"

H4 visas have been nicknamed "depression visas"—there's even a Facebook group called "H4 visa, a curse" that has more than 3,500 members. It was started by Rashi Bhatnagar, 30, who holds a master's degree from her home country of India, where she worked as a journalist before moving to the U.S. in 2009 with her software engineer husband. She attends as many as three classes a day at her gym to keep herself occupied. "I see a lot of women going to work, and I stay home alone," she says. "I want to do something of my own. Back home I was very independent, but here my confidence is gone."

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[Add a comment](#)**Rashi Bhatnagar** · Admin at H4 visa, a curse · 135 subscribers

Thanks Marie Claire and Kayla Webley for doing an excellent write up on H4 visa holders who are legally staying in the US. Announcement - Please check our new blog H4 visa, a curse <http://h4-visa-a-curse.blogspot.com> Be a part of discussions and regular updates by liking our new Facebook page (not the group) <https://www.facebook.com/H4visaacurse> [H4 visa, a curse](#) Invite your friends to do the same. The blog will hopefully give you an insight about the H4 visa related provisions, laws, advocacy ideas and much more. The large traffic on our FB group has motivated me to start a new FB page which is more organized with advanced settings and features. Thanks a lot to all our members for supporting this cause.

Reply · Like · 10 · October 28, 2013 at 10:45am

**Jyotsna Sharma** · Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning, Pune

Thanks Marie Claire magazine for bringing up the burning issues that we H4 visa holders are suffering from. We are caged and bonded in this free country where people come to live their cherished dreams except for us H4 visa holders. We wish Mrs. Obama reads this.

Reply · Like · 10 · October 28, 2013 at 6:30pm

**Himaja Balakrishnan**

This is so true .Thank you for supporting the cause.

There are so many women like me in this country who go through this pain every moment and yet determined that the future is going to be better off and then we could start being independent women again! desperately waiting for the Government to take up this debate on Immigration soon!

Reply · Like · 8 · October 28, 2013 at 11:45am

**Rashi Bhatnagar** · Admin at H4 visa, a curse · 135 subscribers

Be a part of discussions and regular updates by liking our new Facebook page (not the group) <https://www.facebook.com/H4visaacurse> [H4 visa, a curse](#) Invite your friends to do the same.

Reply · Like · March 30 at 8:56pm

**Shah Peerally** · Top Commenter · President at Shah Peerally Law Group PC - US Immigration Lawyers · 175 subscribers

This is an really sad issue. We have been fighting to have this law changed especially [Rashi Bhatnagar](#) group. We are proud of their determination. All of you should support this cause. I have seen too many people on H4 visa suffer especially women and children to the extend that there is a movie coming out on the cause "H4 The Curse" - please help them!

Reply · Like · 5 · October 28, 2013 at 10:42am

**Shah Peerally** · Top Commenter · President at Shah Peerally Law Group PC - US Immigration Lawyers · 175 subscribers

Trailer of the upcoming movie on the subject <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nD7gAcxx8wv>

Reply · Like · 4 · November 14, 2013 at 9:02pm

**Preethi Parvataneni**

Thanks for making an effort to understand the situation. Really appreciate for your contribution on behalf of each and every H4 Visa holder.

Reply · Like · 4 · October 28, 2013 at 11:26am

**Priti Mendonca**

So true... been dependant in this country for 7 yrs now. Loosing on self confidence, self esteem and self worth. Lot of strain on marriage. Its a very painful situation to be in.

Reply · Like · 3 · October 29, 2013 at 9:15am

**Sarika Handa** · K C College (Kishanchand Chellaram)

I can imagine how it is ..

Reply · Like · October 29, 2013 at 5:19pm

**Sara Muun**

SO TRUE ...

Reply · Like · December 15, 2013 at 4:22pm

**Ramya CR** · Christ Junior College

"H4 visas have been nicknamed "depression visas"... this nickname is so very apt!! Desperately hoping the Government will soon initiate this reform. This will provide opportunity for the H4 visa holders to use their skills and knowledge thereby benefitting both, this country and themselves.

Reply · Like · 3 · October 28, 2013 at 10:50am

**Shah Peerally** · Top Commenter · President at Shah Peerally Law Group PC - US Immigration Lawyers · 175 subscribers

Please like the page <http://facebook.com/h4thecurse> and support the upcoming movie on the matter

Reply · Like · 2 · October 28, 2013 at 11:17am

**Ramya CR** · Christ Junior College

Done

Reply · Like · 1 · October 28, 2013 at 11:42am

**Kiera Carvalho** · Santa Monica, California

Very well-written article! Thanks for supporting the cause! We need more such articles out there!

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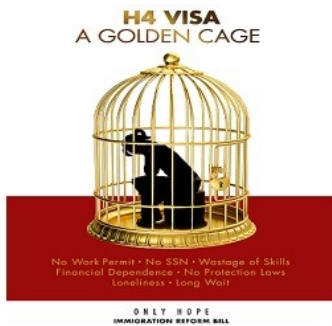
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Languishing in a golden cage



By [Jinal Shah](#)

Even as the comprehensive immigration reform proposal stumbling on Capitol Hill, defying President Obama who wants to push it by the end of this year. The Republican led House is considering a piecemeal and conditional approach in offering a path to citizenship for the nation's undocumented immigrants, there is a group of people, mostly legal immigrant women, waiting for policymakers to take action on a less controversial piece of the reform bill.

One of those women is Rashi Bhatnagar, 30, an Indian national who came to the US in 2009. A lifestyle journalist with an international magazine publishing group in India, she had married a long distance boyfriend she was dating for four years. He was granted H1B - a visa given to highly skilled workers in demand in the US. And she got dependent visa - H4.

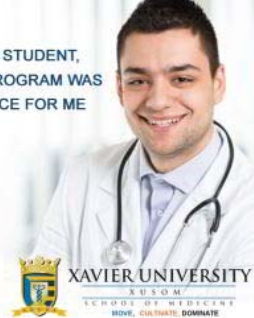
Every day while he goes to work as an IT professional, Rashi engages in soul-destroying household chores, kills time in the aisles of department stores, and hits the gym 3-4 times a day. For many, her life maybe enviable but she feels "trapped in a golden cage." Investing in a master's degree made no sense because she already had one from India. Testing the job market proved futile as companies refused to sponsor H1B visa without Employment Authorization Document (EAD) issued by the USCIS.

"Imagine that you are moving to a foreign land with your spouse. After you arrive, you are confined to the four walls. Your immigration status makes you ineligible for a work permit, and so, you cannot get a credit card or a driving license, or open a bank account, without the H1B's consent, or rent an apartment, or take a student loan, or buy a car. Imagine that four years later you are still waiting for those basic rights. That's my world," laments Rashi Bhatnagar, echoing countless other H4 wives who are politically nonexistent, and thus powerless to ask for what is a basic human right - the right to be self-sufficient.

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AS A MOTIVATED STUDENT,
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Rashi continues, "Although I was aware that I'd not be able to work here on H4 visa, I didn't know it then that the dependent stamp on my passport will strip me of my independence for years to come. Nobody told me consequences of coming on H visa - long EAD wait due to the retrogression of visa dates, no protection laws, no student loans, no scholarships, and immigration related frauds."

Rashi's not an idiosyncratic case of misery in the wilderness of American suburbia, there are 100,000 to 150,000 people - mostly women and children from Asia stuck in this deadening reality of joblessness, social isolation, and rapid erosion of self-esteem. They have a legal status, they pay taxes, they contribute to social security, but they are involuntarily home bound.

To understand the conundrum of H4 visa holders, it is important to first know about H1B visa. Issued for six years (three plus extension), H1B allows US employers to temporarily employ foreign skilled workers in specialty fields. The H1B visa holder does not have the right to vote but has to pay taxes.

Each year there are 65,000 H1's issued in the US. Even if we take a conservative estimate of about 50% of them being married, there are more than 32,000 dependents entering US from various countries including India and China. These are mainly women, mostly qualified and talented, employable but unemployed.

H1B visa holder can apply for permanent residency in the US but has to wait for years "Under the employment based (EB) 2 category the wait for green card is between 5-12 years whereas on the lower EB3 category the wait time is 8-15 years. Now add six years of being on H-1B category to that. This long wait really takes away the peer years from the H4 visa holders," explains Rashi.

Endless wait and lack of second income often puts strain on married life. "When it becomes difficult to run a family on single income, many times the girl's parents have been asked to pay for her upkeep in the US," said Shivali Shah, attorney and advocate for the rights of H4 visa holders.

Many even invest in the insanely expensive master's program. Not only are they ineligible for student loan they are not even allowed to work part time on-campus. And after all the pain and expense to get a US degree, you are still in a limbo not even eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT), something that students on F1 (full time) or even M visa (part time) enjoy. OPT is a great way for students to display their talent and skills to the employer not having to worry about sponsorship.

With utter frustration, these women are often forced to take an illegal route - doing short courses and faking resumes to get jobs. "Honest H1B families don't favor converting H4 into H1B by showing fake resumes. Many IT job consultants do such illegal stuff and recruit immigrants in dire need of jobs," added Rashi.

Most of the H4's are highly educated and some with business acumen. They can be entrepreneurs, can create job, curb outsourcing of jobs, fill in the shortage of high skilled work force - engineers, doctors, researchers, educators, innovators etc. "Even if we agree to the argument that immigrants come here and take away jobs from local Americans and hence not allowing H4's to apply for jobs, there is no reason why they cannot start their own business. After all it will only boost the economy. I have had discussions with H4 visa holders who agree that instead of dumping wealth back in their home country - buy gold, shares even property - they are willing to invest here in a business, hire more people and hamper illegal work," proposed Rashi.

The law according to these spouses is unfair and biased especially when compared to other legal dependents who are allowed to work and get Social Security Number. "Dependents on L, E and H visa all enter US with the same identity 'Dependents'- then why are spouses on L visa holders (usually executives and managers who come to the US for a relatively shorter period but are eligible to apply for green card) and E (investor) visa granted work permit? We are not asking for citizenship like illegal immigrants, all we are asking is a chance to stand in line for jobs. Rest all depends on our skill and expertise. We are ready to wait but the law should be equal for all legal dependents," asserts Rashi.

To truly come to grips with the intensity of the problem faced by individuals trapped in the H-4 visa quagmire, Rashi set up a Facebook group called 'H-4 visa, a curse.' The group, started in 2011, has more than 4,000 members mostly H4's and their spouses from China, Philippines, Mexico, Spain, UK, Greece, Ukraine, and Pakistan besides India.

"A lot of these members are victims of domestic violence, immigration fraud (duped by IT job consultants) and suffer from problems such as depression and suicidal tendencies," informed Rashi.

Shivali Shah adds another dimension to the issue: "By taking away the choice

to work, these women are essentially being brought into the US for their most basic functions as women: housewives, baby makers and sex partners.”

The consequences are often tragic because many men abuse the power given to them by the law: some wives get only weekly allowances for food; others are forbidden from calling their families back home or taking hobby classes, many are even silent victims of domestic violence and in extreme cases mental and physical abuse. Depending on their husbands for absolutely everything, including the right to remain in the United States, many women are forced to stay in marriages they desperately need to escape.

“Another problem is that most of the South Asian H-1B/H-4 marriages are new so the woman is cut off from all the social networks back home. In the US, she must rely completely on her husband for everything. In cases of abuse, he may not be her best ally,” adds Shivali. She however explains that the emotional trauma, the tension between the couple or family is not the fault of the US government but the law puts the dependent on a disadvantage. “The minute a woman steps foot in the US on an H-4 visa, she has an inferior status in the marriage by law. This power imbalance even messes with many marriages.”

In the fight to secure work authorization to spouses on H4 visa, another small section of dependents are often left behind – the children of H1B visa holders. Recently, children of illegal immigrants who were minors at the time of their entry to US are allowed to stay in the country, issued work permits, whereas H4 dependent kids are forced to move back to their native countries after they attain 21 years of age. “These kids are brought legally as babies by their highly skilled parents. Legal H1B parent pay taxes and respect law of the land. For these kids, US is their mother land, they sing US national anthem and respect the American flag. Despite this Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA) rule is giving work permits to the eligible kids of undocumented workers who came illegally to the US.”

Update: 05-November-2013

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Dark Side of Migration

For Indian women in America, a sea of broken dreams

Narayan Lakshman

When Pavitra's Delta Air Lines flight flew into Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport on a crisp blue July morning back in 2008, her heart pounded with excitement. Though it was a dangerous time economically and few companies were hiring, her husband landed a good job with a major IT firm and was assigned to projects across the U.S.

Pavitra, who had a bachelor's degree from India and some work experience, had made a careful plan to embark on a course of higher studies — permitted under her current H-4 visa — and then seek employment. It was all coming together for her, it seemed. But she was in for a rude shock.

Within months of her settling down in a strange new land, she found out that not only were higher studies a financially draining option, given the lack of funding for spouses of H1-B visa-holders, she was also unable to pursue a graduate programme because with her three-year Indian undergraduate degree she was not considered eligible for graduate enrolment in the U.S.

With a paucity of viable alternatives, she turned her attention to the job market, an effort that proved even more futile. "I tried applying for a job but as soon as the recruiters came to know of my H-4 visa status, they would say they do not sponsor H1-B," Pavitra said.

Matters then took a turn for the worse. Trapped in a labyrinth of visa-related restrictions, she began to feel she had no purpose in life. "I started going through depression, loss of enthusiasm and self-esteem. I started having chronic migraines every day," she said. As migraine attacks went, hers were so severe that she could not even open her eyes, often threw up, and had chills.

"I had to call my husband every day at work, saying I am ill and he used to come home running. Life for him was very difficult, juggling between work commitments and my doctor visits," she said. He was unable to look for better work opportunities since he was worried and wanted to look after her.

Now in the midst of a mind-numbing routine of hobbies, she asks herself: "Where am I in my life today? Still a dependent, still need to start my career fresh at this age." And her future looks cloudy too, as it is a shaky prospect to start and raise a family on a single income, and whenever she tries to get back in the job market, "getting back my self-confidence, independence, self-esteem... [is] going to be a struggle for me."

If Pavitra's situation were an idiosyncratic case of misery in the wilderness of American suburbia, it may not be a collective concern. Yet that is not the case and, to be specific, 1,00,000 to 1,50,000 people, mostly women, from India, other parts of Asia and the rest of the world are stuck in this deadening reality of joblessness and social isolation, rapid erosion of self-esteem, and attendant toxic malfunctions in their personal lives.

Let's step back and consider the facts and numbers in question.

The issue of H-4's debilitating impact on its holders is not a new one. In fact, writing on cases of abuse of H-4 women by their H1-B husbands in *The Hindu* in 2008, Shivali Shah, a New York-based lawyer, explained that the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service does not provide H-4 spouses with work authorisation until well into the green card process.

There is no prospect of working on the H-4 visa per se. The State Department's guidance on a range of non-immigrant visas notes: "A person who has received a visa as the spouse or child of a temporary worker may not accept employment in the U.S. with the exception of spouses of L-1 visa-holders."

"Therefore, these women are financially dependent on their husbands for anywhere from two to nine years," Ms. Shah pointed out, adding "H-4 women are middle-class and have status in the U.S., but immigration laws can make them indigent and undocumented at the whims of their husbands."

So how many individuals are affected by this law? Since around 2004, the USCIS has set the annual cap for H1 visas issued at approximately 65,000. Even if one were to conservatively assume that 50 per cent of these visa-holders were married, it suggests close to 32,500 spouses or partners on H-4 visas a year.

Given that the H-4 visa is often of six-year validity, it would not be far off the mark to assume that there are well over 1,00,000 individuals stuck with this visa, possibly over 1,50,000. Further, the most recent USCIS data quoted in a study by the Brookings Institution suggest that 58 per cent of the H-1B visas are granted to Indians. This means that well over 50,000 Indians are in this position.

This includes only H-1 spouses. There is a host of other visa-types, for example, I-visas for journalists, all of which are subject to the USCIS work ban for their spouses — except L-1s, usually issued for senior executives who are on intra-company transfers from other nations. If the spouses of visa-holders in these categories were also counted, the number of frustrated, but often talented, individuals unable to work would perhaps grow exponentially.

To truly come to grips with the intensity of the problem faced by individuals trapped in the H-4 visa quagmire, a glimpse into the corrosive nature of the visa's work restrictions is useful.

Rashi Bhatnagar, a H-4 visa-holder in the U.S. who was willing to have her real name used in this story — all others have been changed to respect privacy concerns — set up a Facebook group called 'H-4 visa, a curse,' after facing the deadening reality of joblessness, having enjoyed years of a successful career in India. Though she had a master's degree from India, she had numerous doors of opportunity slammed on her in the U.S. after she had to relocate to this country to join her IT-worker husband.

However, Rashi counts herself among the fortunate few, whose spouses have a senior role, some leverage with their employer and hence some hope for flexibility, such as an early or expedited green card application. For most other "H-4s," the mathematics of the waiting time for the right to work is debilitating, killing off their most productive work years from their late twenties to late thirties.

In the EB2 category of temporary, non-immigrant workers, a H-4 visa spouse would typically wait for six years before a green card application is made and then potentially another six years for the issuance of the green card. This makes a total of around 12 years, time spent languishing in the aisles of Walmart, making small-talk with vendors on street corners, engaged in the soul-destroying household chores and the limited joys of child-rearing.

In the EB3 category, the six-year wait for the green card process initiation is compounded by an even longer eight-12 year wait for the green card itself, requiring the H-4 visa-holders to hold their life in suspended animation for a staggering 14-18 years. Over the passage of such a length of time, all hope of resuscitating one's passion to pursue a meaningful career is likely to be extinguished, with only a sense of lonely desperation left in its wake.

Keywords: [US visa restrictions](#), [H-4 spouses](#), [Indian women in America](#), [H1-B visa-holders](#), [H-4 visa](#), [non-immigrant visas](#), [green card application](#), [job market in US](#)