

# AN INDENTURED SERVANT

THE IMPACT OF GREEN CARD WAITING TIME ON THE LIFE OF HIGHLY  
SKILLED INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlighting the archaic immigration system in the United States of America (US), the present study demonstrates for the first time the impact of green card waiting time on the work and family life of Indian immigrants living in the US. As of April 2018, there were 632,219 Indian immigrants (including their spouses and minor children, and 306,400 working Indian immigrants) waiting for a green card and the current waiting time is 151 years for the EB-2 (Advanced degree) category. This study was conducted in September 2018, and the qualitative and quantitative responses were gathered from 1042 participants. Most of our participants were male (81%) and married (93.5%). Also, a majority of the participants were working on H-1B visas in the engineering domain or healthcare/medicine domain. Furthermore, a majority of the participants lived in California, followed by New Jersey and Texas. It is also important to note here that most of these participants reported living in the US for 10 years or more at the time of this research.

Our present findings show that 93.4% of our participants are very concerned about the estimated green card waiting time in the US. We find 70% of the total participants are seriously thinking at the present time about emigrating to a more visa-friendly country. Also, 30% of the participants have already applied for permanent residency in a visa friendly country and 9% of the participants have already obtained a permanent residency in a more visa-friendly country. Based on these turnover intentions, we estimate the potential direct costs to American organizations due to the green card waiting time to be in the range of \$19,303,200,000 - \$54,261,724,160.

Furthermore, our quantitative results show that the delay in receiving a green card is negatively affecting the work and family/nonwork life of Indian immigrants in the US. With

respect to work life, we found a significant number of participants are struggling with wage stagnation, job insecurity, and lack of career advancement opportunities. Additionally, the current delays in visa processing is also causing financial burden to participants' families, and negatively impacting respondents' business and personal travel opportunities (even to return to family in India in case of emergencies). Through qualitative responses, participants further highlighted that they face critical issues such as career roadblocks, financial insecurities, travel issues (both business and personal), other family issues (more specifically family living apart), kids ageing out and H4-EAD (dependent spouse) issues.

These critical issues are in turn causing health issues such as constant fear of unknown (uncertainty and feeling stuck issues due to green card backlog), stress, frustration and chronic health issues. Additionally, most of the participants responded that they are very concerned with the recent policy changes made by Trump administration. They are concerned that the H-1B visa could be denied without RFE (Request for Evidence). Also, they are worried about the rescinding of work permits for H4-EAD workers and the temporary suspension of the H-1B premium processing. Participants also were asked to react to the RAISE Act, a new merit-based immigration system for America proposed by the Trump administration. Although, most Indian immigrants strongly agree with the elements of the RAISE Act, they are skeptical as to how the American administration will deal with older skilled employees who have already spent a large part of their career working in the US.

Overall, in addition to the direct losses, the work and family issues caused due to the green card waiting time could result in indirect losses to organizations. Emigration of these skilled immigrants to a more visa-friendly country could lead to brain drain and loss of talent. Even if these individuals choose to stay in the US, the identified work issues (job insecurity,

wage stagnation, lack of promotion opportunities, business travel issues and inability to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities) and personal issues (financial insecurities, personal travel issues, and health issues such as stress, fear of unknown, frustration and chronic health issues) may contribute to a variety of negative psychological health conditions (e.g., burnout) for these workers, which may further lead to indirect losses such as low performance and productivity, and lack of innovation and organizational commitment. We hope that the present findings may be useful to American policy makers and organizational leaders as further decisions are made regarding the American immigration system. In particular, we hope these findings will help to illustrate many serious implications associated with the green card delays and other visa-related proposed policy changes on immigrants, and their spouses, families, and communities.

## INTRODUCTION

*“Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life.” – Quote from the book Nation of Immigrants, John F. Kennedy*

*“What makes someone American isn’t just blood or birth but allegiance to our founding principles and faith in the idea that anyone- from anywhere- can write the next great chapter of our story.” – Remarks on Comprehensive Immigration Reform, Barack Obama*

*“Don’t be afraid to welcome [immigrants]. Offer them the warmth of the love of Christ...I am certain that, as so often in the past, these people will enrich America and its Church.” – Quote from a speech at St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington, D.C., Pope Francis*

*“America’s immigration system is outdated, unsuited to the needs of our economy and to the values of our country. We should not be content with laws that punish hard-working people and deny businesses willing workers and invite chaos at our border.” – Remarks on Immigration Policy, George W. Bush*

*“Nikola Tesla was an immigrant. So were Joseph Pulitzer and Albert Einstein and Igor Stravinsky. Rational, compassionate, immigration reform is needed so that the next Teslas and Einsteins are not denied access to educational or entrepreneurial opportunities in the United States. The time has come.” – Opinions of Novelist, John Green*

As illustrated in these quotes, prominent figures from all walks of life acknowledge the importance of immigration to the societal and economic development of the United States of America (US). Despite this recognition, American immigration policies are outdated and broken. Specifically, the American government has not updated the quotas for legal immigration system since the year 1990 (Migration Policy Institute, 2016), despite increasing general populations and overall strengthening of the American economy. Current quotas for legal immigration system also vary based on nationality (place of birth) of the immigrant. As one example, Indian immigrants are imposed with extremely restrictive per-country immigration limits, resulting in absurdly long waiting times for green card (permanent residency) processing. Currently, it is estimated that the projected time (CATO Institute, 2018) for Indian immigrants waiting for a green card is, depending on personal classification: 6 years for EB-1 (Extraordinary ability), 151 years for EB-2 (Advanced degrees), and 17 years for EB-3 (Bachelors degrees). Most highly skilled Indian immigrants fall under the EB-2 category which has the biggest backlog as of April 2018 (433,368 individuals waiting for green card) when compared to EB-1 (83,578 individuals) and EB-3 (115,273 individuals) category. For a broader sense of perspective on this issue, as of April 2018, there were 632,219 Indian immigrants (including 325,819 spouses and minor children, and 306,400 working Indian immigrants) waiting for a green card (CATO Institute, 2018).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, most highly skilled Indian immigrants to the US fall within the EB2 category and therefore the delay in receiving the green card could be as long as 151 years. In short, these immigrants may never receive their green card in their lifetime and this presents substantial complications in both work and personal life for these individuals. Hence, these numbers illustrate the dire situation for Indian immigrants created by the current

American immigration system. Furthermore, we argue that the recent proposed changes in the current immigration policies (i.e., rescinding of work permit [H4-EAD] visa, suspension of premium processing of H-1B visa, denial of H-1B visa without issuing Request for Evidence [RFE], and the proposed merit-based immigration system [RAISE Act]) by the Trump administration, are intensifying the existing complications associated with green card waiting time in the work and nonwork/family life of Indian immigrants.

In the present study, therefore, we focused on the impact of green card waiting time on important aspects of work and nonwork/family life of Indian immigrants in America. In addition to the green card waiting time issue, we also specifically examined immigrants' concerns relating to the proposed changes to US immigration policies. We further studied the impact of green card waiting time and the proposed immigration policy changes on repatriation (e.g., seriously thinking of returning to home country India within the next 12 months) and emigration (i.e., seriously thinking of emigrating to a more visa-friendly country within the next 12 months) intentions. In presenting and discussing our findings, we also estimate and discuss the direct and indirect costs and impacts of these immigration-related concerns among Indian immigrants within the American economy. In the following sections, we discuss the existing American immigration model, highlight the contributions of Indian immigrants in the US, and share our findings from our 2018 survey of Indian immigrants working in the US.

#### **AN ARCHAIC IMMIGRATION MODEL: DISCRIMINATING BASED ON NATIONALITY**

Indian immigrants have been arriving on American shores since the year 1820 (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). It was not until 1921 that the American Congress first created a quota on immigration. This quota was based on worldwide limits that gave preference to immigrants from “white” countries. In 1924, restrictions were imposed based on individual nationalities (within

per-country limits). These restrictions openly discriminated against Asians, Africans, and Eastern Europeans (mostly those with Jewish heritage) (CATO Institute, 2017). Finally, the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, signed at the foot of the Statue of Liberty in New York City, ended this quota system based on national origin or per-country limits (CATO Institute, 2017).

According to this act, immigrants belonging to any country received up to seven percent of the green card allotted each year. This was an improvement, but immigrants were still treated as national representatives and the per-country limits treated each nation equally, but not each immigrant equally (CATO Institute, 2016).

Further major revisions were made to American immigration policy to diversify the American population by creating immigration opportunity for underrepresented ethnic groups with the 1990 Immigration Act, which introduced the Diversity Visa Lottery Program (USA Diversity Lottery, n. d). Through this program immigrants from countries with lower rates of immigration to the US are given priority. Within this lottery program, therefore, Indian immigrants are not eligible for priority treatment, given the existing high rates of immigration from India compared to other countries. The Immigration Act of 1990 also was an attempt to prioritize visa apportionment to immigrants based on skills and education, by increasing the cap on H-1B visas. Despite this, the Diversity Visa Lottery Program under this Act still encourages selection of immigrants based more on country of origin than on personal merits. For example, given equal numbers of immigrants from Estonia and India all applying for green cards, immigrants from Estonia will receive their green cards sooner than immigrants from India, regardless of relative skills and education present within the immigrants from both countries (CATO Institute, 2016).

There is another issue with the current immigration process that needs to be highlighted. There are currently only 140,000 employment-based green cards available for allocation to immigrants each year (Center for Immigration Studies, 2017). Under the current seven percent rule, this means that each country gets 10,000 permits. This gets more complicated, however, given muddling that can occur when an immigrant has an H-1B visa and is also allowed to apply for a green card. The H-1B program is used to provide temporary employment to foreign workers in specialty occupations of distinguished merit and ability in the US (US Department of Labor, n. d., “Overview”). This program helps employers hire employees with business skills and abilities which are otherwise not available in US workforce. When the employers retain these foreign workers on a more permanent basis they apply for a green card which allows foreign nationals to live and work permanently in the US.

Given that Indian immigrants are top recipients of H-1B visas (accounting for 74% of the 345,000 issued in FY 2016; current annual cap (2019) for the H-1B category is at 65,000; USCIS, n.d., “H-1B program”), the current 10,000 green cards per country cap limit leaves a disproportionate number of Indian immigrants waiting in the green card line. This is particularly problematic given that a high percentage of these immigrants are also very highly educated and skilled, and could provide tremendous value to the American and global economy if their citizenship status could be more efficiently resolved. As of April 2018, there were 632,219 Indian immigrants (including their spouses and minor children) waiting for green card processing. Given the current waiting time, previously noted at 151 years for the EB-2 (Advanced degree) category, it is highly unlikely that most of these people will receive their green card in their life time (CATO Institute, 2018).

In summary, then, the current American immigration policies discriminate against immigrants from more populous countries and favor immigrants from less populous countries. Within the US, current policies also do not effectively take into account the education and skills that many immigrants can bring and that would enable them to become immediately valuable contributors to the American and global economy. With this report, we are highlighting that the American Congress has made no changes to these policies in the last 28 years and that this period of static immigration policies is detrimental to the future economic vitality and competitiveness of the US (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). Although the Obama administration allowed spouses of H-1B holders (H4-EAD workers) to work in 2015, this only provided temporary relief to Indian immigrant families waiting for their green card. However, the current Trump administration has proposed to revoke the working permit for H4-EAD workers which could further complicate the work and nonwork life of these immigrant workers. Furthermore, the current administration has also proposed a merit based immigration system – RAISE Act, a point-based system that takes into consideration the education level and age for awarding green cards. But, RAISE Act bill has been opposed by Democrats, immigrant rights group and some Republicans, and there has been no clarity regarding whether this immigration policy would be implemented in the future. In the next section, we examine one example of this by focusing on the contributions made by the Indian immigrant community to the American economy.

### **INDIAN IMMIGRANTS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL AND AMERICAN ECONOMY**

Research has shown that overall immigrants form 3.4% of the world's population and they contribute nearly 10% of the global GDP (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016). More specifically, they are responsible for contributing approximately \$6.7 trillion to global GDP in 2015 (that is, roughly \$3

trillion more than they would have produced in their origin countries). However, immigrants can generate an additional boost of \$800 billion to \$1 trillion to worldwide economic output annually when they are integrated more effectively across various aspects of education, housing, health and community. Focusing on American Indian immigrants, we can say that the economic impact of this immigrant group is striking and has evolved over time.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Indian immigrants who moved to the US were mostly farm laborers (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). However, today Indian immigrants are highly educated and highly skilled. As of 2015, the population of Indian immigrants in the US has grown to 2.4 million making them the second largest immigrant group (6% of the 43.4 million foreign-born population) after Mexicans (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). Indian immigrants have shown their technology innovation capabilities in areas such as data management, application performance management, Big Data and analytics, cloud-based platforms, computer and network security, etc. (National Foundation for American Policy, 2016). Furthermore, Indian immigrants are more likely to be proficient in English when compared to many other foreign-born immigrants, making Indian immigrants a high-value immigrant group particularly for high-skill and high-interpersonal contact jobs (Migration Policy Institute, 2015).

With respect to education, Indian immigrants have higher educational attainment than other immigrant and American-born populations. Statistics show that more than half of college-educated Indian immigrants have advanced degrees and 77% of Indian immigrants (aged 25 and above) hold bachelor's or higher degree, compared to 29% of all immigrants and 31% of American-born adults (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). According to the Institute of International Education, around 166,000 Indian immigrant students enrolled in American institutions of higher education for the 2015-2016 school year, the second-largest immigrant

group after Chinese students (328,000) (Migration Policy Institute, 2017). Nearly, 80% of Indian immigrant students were enrolled in STEM programs. Also, in 2015, 14% of all temporary visas (e.g., H-1B holders) were assigned to Indian immigrants who earned doctorate degrees at American colleges and universities; upon graduation 80% of these individuals intended to continue to work in the US (National Science Foundation, 2017).

Immigrants have founded a majority (44 companies) of the technology companies in the US, which collectively are worth around \$168 billion (Fortune, 2016). Of these technology companies, 14 were founded by Indian immigrants. For example, some of the notable Indian technologists in America's Silicon Valley include Satya Nadella (CEO of Microsoft), Sundar Pichai (CEO of Google), Vinod Khosla (co-founder of Sun Microsystems), Sabeer Bhatia (co-founder of Hotmail), and Shantanu Narayan (Chairman and CEO of Adobe Systems). Between the years 1995 and 2005, Indian immigrants also founded more engineering and technological companies than immigrants from the UK, China, Taiwan, and Japan combined. Also, 26% of all immigrant-founded companies in the US were founded by Indian immigrants (UC Berkeley, 2007).

At a higher level again, immigrants have also strongly contributed towards the development of highly valuable intellectual property in the US, which is a crucial component of the country's economic success. For example, in 2006 (SSRN, 2009) more than 40% of international patent applications filed by the American government had foreign-born authors. Also, 72% of total patents at Qualcomm, 65% at Merck, 64% at General Electric, and 60% at Cisco Systems were all filed by immigrants. Getting back to our focus on Indian immigrants, even though this group accounts for less than 1% of the American population, 14% of all patents were specifically filed by Indian immigrants.

In sum, although Indian immigrants have contributed sufficiently to the American economy with respect to technology and innovation, they are not able to contribute to their fullest potential due to the green card backlog issue. The current green card backlog and waiting time (as discussed in the previous section) means that the American and global economy is likely losing because of the inefficient and imbalanced processing of immigrants, just from this one population group. As just outlined in the preceding paragraphs, Indian immigrants have provided a disproportionate level of positive impacts to the American and global economy, yet this group is not given any preference when it comes to the current processing of new immigrants. Under proposed new immigration policies and practices, the situation may get even worse for Indian immigrants.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

In the previous sections we have highlighted the inefficient and outdated American immigration model and how it disproportionately (in terms of value and impact to the American economy) discriminates against Indian immigrants based on crude nation-level quotas. Potentially making matters worse, under the current American presidential administration (the Trump administration) the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is planning to reverse an immigration policy adjustment from 2015 that granted work permits to dependent spouses (with H4-EAD status) of H-1B holders. The USCIS has also temporarily suspended the premium processing for H-1B petitions and can deny an application, petition, or request for H-1B visas without issuing Request for Evidence (RFE) or Notice of Intent to Deny (NOID).

Furthermore, the current Trump administration has proposed a merit-based immigration system – RAISE Act. Along with the green card backlog situation, these new policy changes will

not only increase the level of uncertainty among temporary visa workers, but also will restrict spouses of expatriates on H4-EAD from working. The present study brings to light some of the pressing issues associated with these impending immigration policy changes, as reported by Indian immigrants. The information shared by these individuals is particularly important to consider given the current political climate and ongoing discussions about future American immigration policy.

Previous research has shown that spousal work restrictions negatively affect Indian expatriate's work role and more general life satisfaction living in the US (Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2018). In this previous study, spouses of these expatriates reported experiencing a variety of issues associated with financial challenges, generalized frustration, loss of respect/low confidence, boredom, social isolation and domestic tension. Based on these previous findings and the current state of visa backlogs, we expected green card waiting time and new policy changes regarding temporary workers (mostly on H-1B visa) to negatively impact the work/family life and overall wellbeing of Indian immigrants in the US. We also expected Indian immigrants to display strong repatriation and emigration intentions (i.e., to return to their home country of India or other visa-friendly countries).

## **METHOD**

The data for this study were gathered in September 2018. The participants for this study were highly skilled Indian immigrants working in the US. The members of this population were born in India and expatriated to the US as adults (at least 18 years old). We contacted approximately 3000 Indian immigrants through various Indian organizations in the US to participate in this research. Members belonging to SIIA (Skilled Immigrants in America) were contacted through social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Telegram messenger). Purposive

sampling took place at the NATA (North American Telugu Association, Indo-American organization of Telugus from North America) which was held in Atlanta in the year 2014, where names, occupation, job title, email address, and phone numbers were collected for potential participants who met the inclusion criteria. Also, participants from Kannada Koota (North American Kannada Association, Indo-American organization of Kannadigas) working in the US industry were recruited to participate in the survey. Participants were asked to respond to an internet-based survey (using Qualtrics) composed of targeted measures detailed in findings section. The final overall sample consisted of 1413 individuals who responded to the survey. After the completion of the data cleaning process, we found that 1042 individuals had responded to a majority of the survey questions and could, therefore, be included in the analyses. The following subsections outline the findings with respect to the questions posed to survey respondents.

## FINDINGS

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Information such as gender, marital status, number of years spent in the US, visa status, occupation domain, and current state of residence in the US was collected from participants. With respect to gender, marital status, and visa status, out of 1042 participants only 728 participants responded to these questions. Of the 728 participants who provided gender information, 591 (81%) were male and 137 (19%) were female participants. Regarding marital status, 44 (6%) were single, 681 (93.5%) were married, and 3 were divorced (0.4%). Also, 603 (82.8%) participants were on H-1B visa, 90 (12.4%) were on H4-EAD, 2 (0.3%) were on J1, 16 (2.2%) on F1-OPT, and 17 (2.3%) participants were on the other visas (mostly L1 visa).

With respect to occupational domain, of the 725 participants who responded to this question, 493 (68%) were from Engineering, 36 (5%) were from Business, 74 (10.2%) from Medicine/healthcare, 2 (0.3%) were from Law and 120 (16.6%) belonged to other (mostly Banking and Financial services) domain. Out of 1042 participants, 674 participants mentioned the US state they are currently residing, and the top three states were California (106; 15.7%), followed by New Jersey (68; 10%) and Texas (66; 9.8%). Finally, most of the participants had lived in the US for around 10 years (17.3%;  $M = 9$  years,  $SD = 3.14$ ) or more.

The participants in the present study represent a subset of the entire Indian immigrant population in the US. A previous report on educational attainment of approved H-1B recipients (FY 2016) show that 45% of them had a master's degree, 44% had bachelor's degree, and 7% had a doctorate degree (Migration Policy Institute, 2018). That same report shows that most of the H-1B holders (69%) worked in computer related occupations followed by engineering, administrative and medicine and health occupations. This population profile closely matches what we observed in the present sample, in which a majority of participants worked in the engineering domain (mostly computer and IT related occupation) followed by healthcare and business-related occupations. In general, the highest number of certified H-1B LCAs (Labor Condition Applications) worked at sites in California, Texas, New York, and New Jersey (Migration Policy Institute, 2018). Most of the participants in our study are also from these states. Since Indian immigrants were the top recipients of the H-1B visa, these comparisons lead us to believe that the sample for the present study is representative of the total Indian immigrant population in the US.

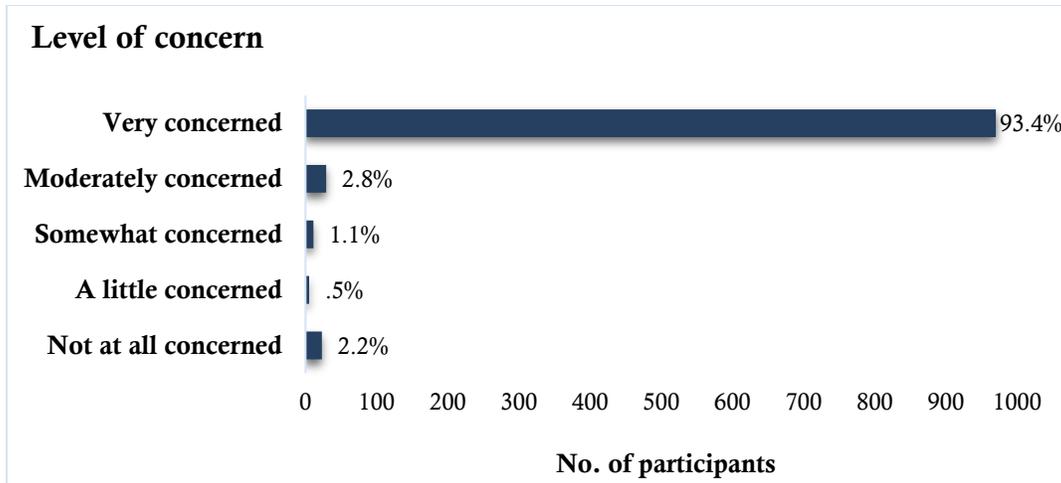
The remainder of the present survey prompted participants to respond to a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. Findings pertaining to these questions are summarized in

the following subsections. Analyzing the responses to these questions, we were able to study the impact of green card waiting time on work and family life of Indian immigrants. We also specifically focus here on the concerns relating to changes in current immigration policies (i.e., rescinding of work permit [H4-EAD] visa, suspension of premium processing of H-1B visa, denial of H-1B visa without RFE and the proposed merit-based immigration system, RAISE Act). We also examined the impact of these immigration policies on repatriation and emigration intentions. Finally, we estimated the direct and indirect costs of these intentions to the US economy.

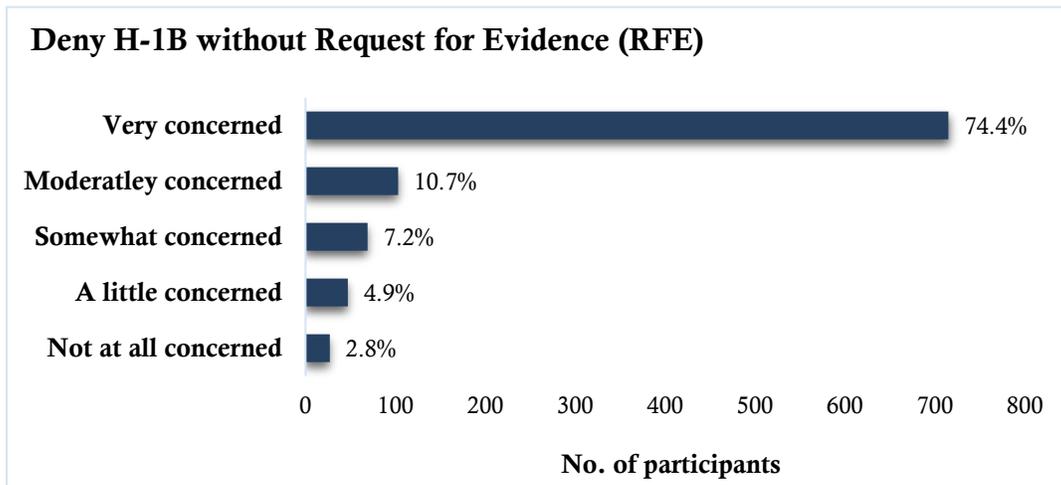
#### **IMPACT OF GREEN CARD BACKLOG ON WORK AND NONWORK/FAMILY LIFE**

We asked participants to indicate their level of concern with current green card waiting times in the US (five-point response scale ranging from 1=Not at all concerned to 5=Very concerned). Also, we evaluated the perceived impact of green card waiting time on several important aspects of work and nonwork/family life (response here on a seven-point scale ranging from 1=Disagree strongly to 7=Agree Strongly). Descriptive statistics summarizing the responses to these items are presented in Figure 1 and Table 1. Furthermore, we asked participants to explain their personal situation in more detail with respect to the current green card delay via an open-ended question.

Our results show that most of the participants (93.4%; Figure 3) are very concerned about the estimated green card waiting time. Quantitative results (see Table 1) show that the delay in receiving green card is negatively affecting the work and family/nonwork life of Indian immigrants. Respondents report suffering from wage stagnation, job insecurity, lack of career promotion opportunities, financial burden, business travel issues, and personal travel issues which prevent them from visiting their family in India in case of emergencies.



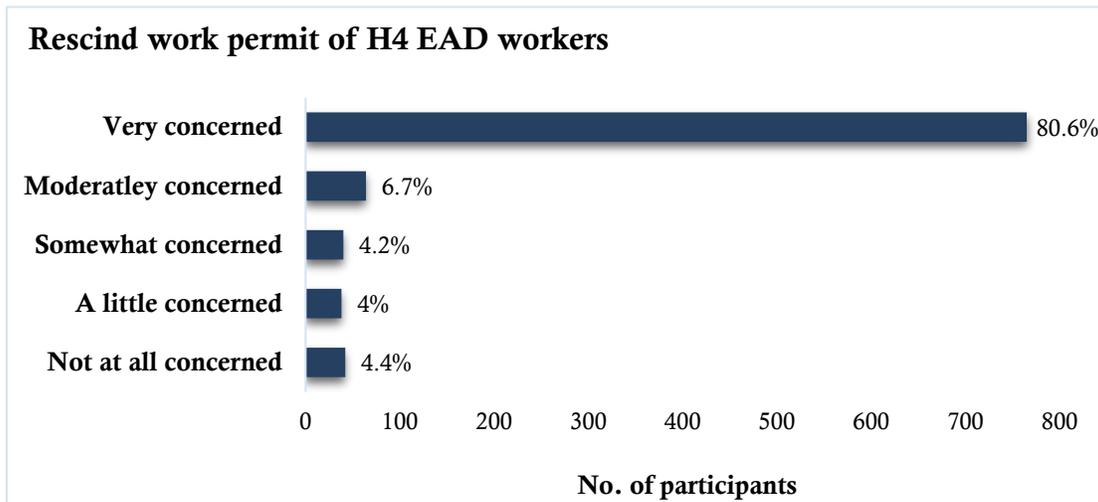
*Figure 1. How concerned are you by this estimated Green card waiting time?* Of the 1038 participants, 970 (93.4%) are very concerned, 29 (2.8%) are moderately concerned and 23 (2.2%) participants are not at all concerned with this statement. Therefore, 93.4% of the participants are very concerned with the green card waiting time.



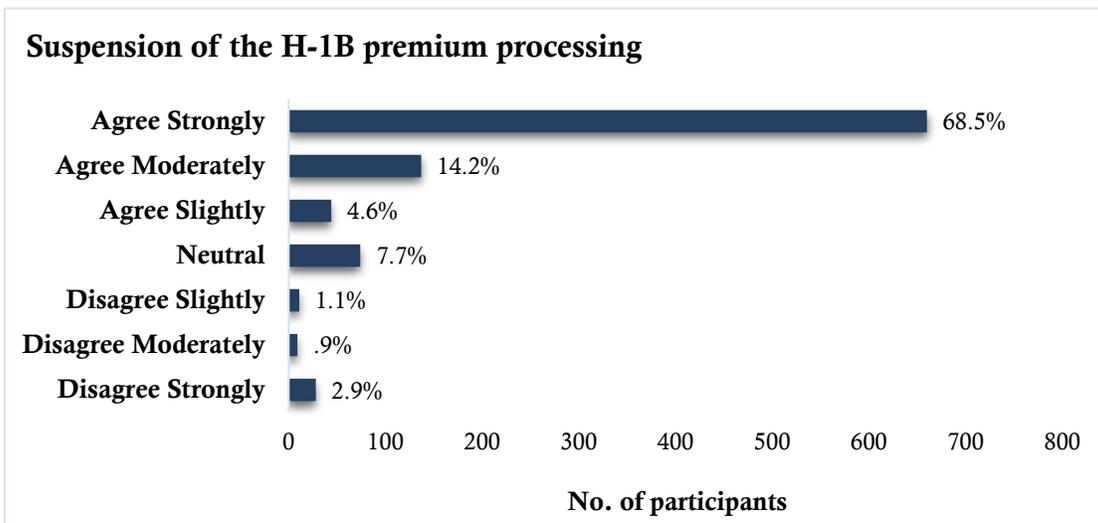
*Figure 2. According to a new policy that will come into effect from 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2018, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) can deny an application, petition, or request for H-1B visas without first issuing a Request for Evidence (RFE) or Notice of Intent to Deny (NOID) if initial evidence is not submitted or if the evidence in the record does not establish eligibility. Officers can deny an H-1B application without first having to issue a Request for Evidence (RFE).* Of the 961 participants, 715 (74.4%) are very concerned, 103 (10.7%) are moderately concerned, and 69 (11.8%) somewhat concerned with this statement. Therefore, 74.4% of the participants are very concerned that H-1B visa could be denied without RFE.

<b>Green card waiting time is...</b>	<b><i>N</i></b>	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Disagree Moderately</b>	<b>Disagree Slightly</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree Slightly</b>	<b>Agree Moderately</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>
Negatively affecting my work life	1035	24 (2.3%)	2 (0.2%)	4 (0.4%)	16 (1.5%)	29 (2.8%)	80 (7.7%)	880 (85%)
Negatively affecting my nonwork/family life	1033	22 (2.1%)	4 (0.4%)	2 (0.2%)	10 (1%)	26 (2.5%)	86 (8.3%)	883 (85.5%)
Causing wage stagnation, where my employer is not paying me well since I am tied to my job due to the green card process	1028	52 (5.1%)	24 (2.3%)	43 (4.2%)	143 (13.9%)	99 (9.6%)	150 (14.6%)	517 (50.3%)
Negatively affecting promotion opportunities at work (for example, having a green card would allow me to change employers or apply for a job that requires security clearance)	1029	32 (3.1%)	9 (0.9%)	15 (1.5%)	48 (4.7%)	57 (5.5%)	108 (10.5%)	760 (73.9%)
Negatively affecting business travel opportunities (for example, due to visa renewal and visa stamping process)	1028	27 (2.6%)	6 (0.6%)	10 (1%)	55 (5.4%)	60 (5.8%)	88 (8.6%)	782 (76.1%)
Negatively affecting travel plans to India in case of family emergencies (for example, due to visa renewal and visa stamping process)	1027	30 (2.9%)	12 (1.2%)	12 (1.2%)	23 (2.2%)	24 (2.3%)	65 (6.3%)	861 (83.8%)
Causing financial burden (for example, due to high interest rates for personal loans and medical premiums caused by temporary status of my visa and for being a non-permanent resident)	1026	42 (4.1%)	20 (1.9%)	32 (3.1%)	111 (10.8%)	84 (8.2%)	99 (9.6%)	638 (62.2%)
Causing job insecurity	1017	24 (2.4%)	4 (0.4%)	4 (0.4%)	34 (3.3%)	50 (4.9%)	76 (7.5%)	825 (81.1%)

*Table 1.* Quantitative items relating to important aspects of work and nonwork/family life



*Figure 3. The current administration is planning to rescind the work permit of H4 EAD (dependent visa) workers. Of the 949 participants, 765 (80.6%) are very concerned, and 64 (6.7%) are moderately concerned with this statement. Therefore, 80.6% of the participants are very concerned with rescinding of the work permit of H4 EAD workers.*



*Figure 4. Recently, the USCIS temporarily suspended the Premium Processing for H-1B Petitions. This temporary suspension has now been extended to Feb 19th, 2019. I am worried about this future policy change on H-1B. Of the 963 participants, 660 (68.5%) agree strongly, 137 (14.2%) agree moderately and 74 (7.7%) participants responded neutral with this statement. Therefore, 68.5% of the participants are very concerned with the suspension of the H-1B premium processing.*

From Table 1, we can infer that of the 1035 participants, 880 (85%) agree strongly that the green card waiting time is negatively affecting their work life. Of the 1033 participants, 883 (85.5%) agree strongly that the green card waiting time is negatively affecting their nonwork/family life. Further, 517 (50.3%) agree strongly that the green card waiting time is causing wage stagnation, 760 (73.9%) agree strongly that the green card waiting time is negatively affecting promotion opportunities, 782 (76.1%) agree strongly that the green card waiting time is negatively affecting business travel opportunities, 861 (83.8%) agree strongly, that the green card waiting time is negatively affecting travel plans to home country India in case of family emergencies, 638 (62.2%) agree strongly that the green card waiting time is causing them financial burden, and 825 (81.1%) agree strongly that the green card waiting time is causing them job insecurity. While waiting for their green cards, these individuals are further plagued with recent policy changes relating to H-1B and H4 (dependent) visa. Of the 961 participants, 715 (74.4%) are very concerned very that H-1B visa could be denied without RFE (Figure 2) and of the 949 participants, 765 (80.6%) are very concerned with rescinding of the work permit of H4 EAD workers (Figure 3). Also, of the 963 participants, 660 (68.5%) are worried about with the suspension of the H-1B premium processing (Figure 4).

In sum, these data indicate that Indian immigrants perceive negative impacts of current green card waiting times in both their work and nonwork/family domains of life. In the following section, using qualitative data we further explored how critical issues in work and nonwork/family life of these individuals are impacting the overall wellbeing of these highly skilled Indian immigrants in America.

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**OPEN ENDED ITEM: PLEASE EXPLAIN YOUR PERSONAL SITUATION WITH RESPECT TO CURRENT GREEN CARD DELAYS.**

We analyzed the 664 responses to this open-ended survey item using the Nvivo 12 software program. First, we conducted a word frequency analysis to identify the most frequently occurring words used in the participants' responses (see Figure 5, which shows these words with larger type size indicating greater frequency of use). The top 20 most frequently used words (see Table 2) are represented using word count (the number of times the word occurs) and weighted percentage (the frequency of the word relative to the total words counted).

The top five words are *family* (Word Count [WC] =142; Weighted percentage [WP] =1.35), *employer* (WC = 123; WP = 1.09), *India* (WC = 85; WP = .96), *uncertainty* (WC = 96; WP = .92) and *invest* (WC = 78; WP = .78). Also, these frequently occurring words are represented using a word cloud (see Figure 5).

<b>Frequently used words</b>	<b>Word count (WC)</b>	<b>Weighted % (WP)</b>
family	142	1.35
employer	123	1.09
India	85	0.96
uncertainty	96	0.92
invest	78	0.78
future	67	0.76
travel	61	0.68
career	53	0.59
business	75	0.59
education	54	0.57
stuck	46	0.52
issues	64	0.51
working	97	0.46
opportunities	42	0.45
worried	73	0.45
company	40	0.45
personal	39	0.44
immigration	38	0.43
spouse	37	0.42
dependent	57	0.41

*Table 2.* Frequently occurring words – Qualitative data



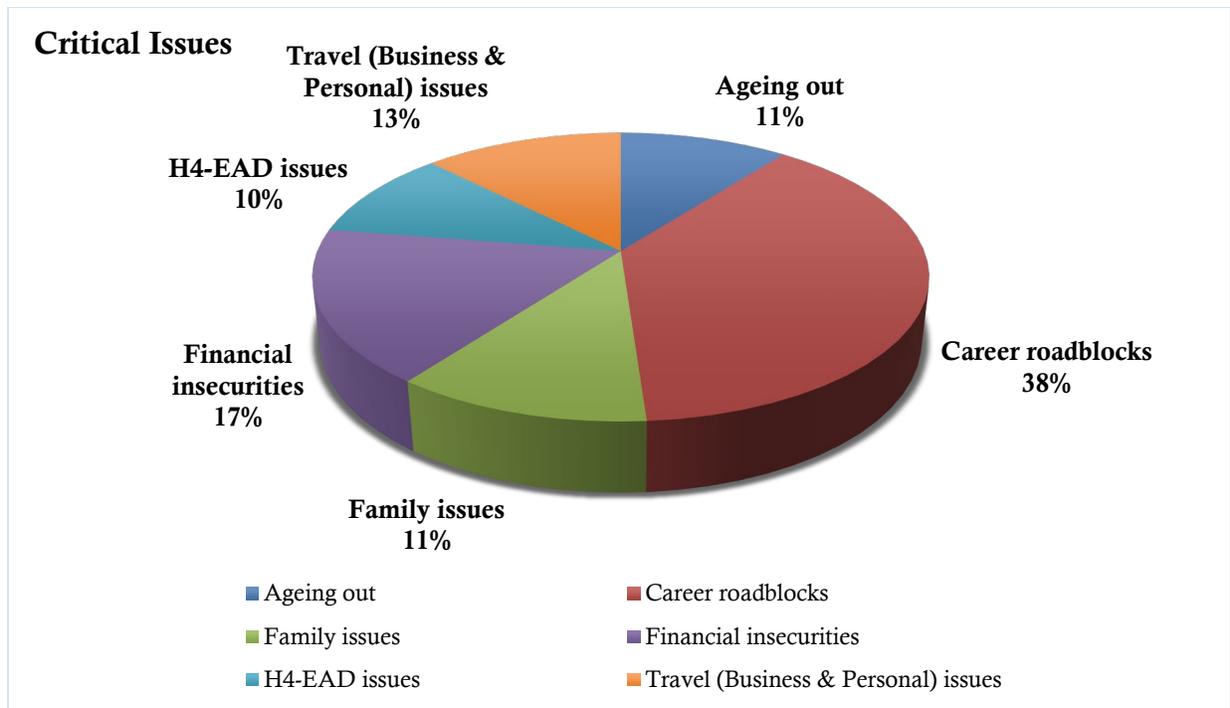


Figure 6. Critical issues analyzed using responses to open-ended question

With respect to **career roadblocks**, mostly participants expressed that in addition to promotion and wage stagnation they are unable to start their own businesses or engage in other forms of entrepreneurial ventures. For example, as noted by some participants,

*“I would like to set up a company potentially employing US citizens, but the current situation does not favor that. It is very challenging to have the motivation to do something but feeling handicapped due to the enormous wait time to get the opportunity to do something with my life.”*

*“I have been in the US for 12 years with a Bachelors and Masters degree. I have 8 patents and publications, but I still have to wait for decades compared to immigrants from other countries who get their green cards within a year. My career would have been very different if I had a green card. The upward mobility of high skilled immigrants in green card backlog is severely hampered. The employer has an unfair advantage over the employee due to the fear of losing your spot in the green card queue and uncertainty. It takes a very heavy emotional and physical toll on you. The family also gets negatively impacted. My wife is in constant fear of losing her h4ead. All this can come to an end by removing the discriminatory per country caps. The per country caps are creating a situation in which a pizza delivery guy from a less populated nation will get*

*their green card within a year whereas a PhD from a highly populated nation has to wait for decades”*

*“I cannot start my own company to implement my ideas to create a better future. I am essentially tied up to my employer because of the long h1b processing times. Potential future employees have a leverage while negotiating salaries because I would need h1b visa until I get my GC. I cannot proactively participate in the society such as voting. Buying a house is tough thing not due to financial situation but due to uncertainty. As more time passes waiting in line the more I feel how I have become a slave to the system, taxation without rights.”*

Many participants also highlighted that the green card waiting time is causing them **financial insecurities** and that they are not able to invest in a home or car due to the uncertainty of the visa status. For example:

*“I have been working in US for the past 7 years. **Delay in processing green card is putting all my financial decision and important life decisions on hold.** Uncertainty with the future of my stay here in US is a biggest factor in taking any decisions. We have two US born school going kids. I am unable to settle down in one city since my projects are for a fixed duration with my current employer. Since there are not many opportunities within the same city and the difficulties involved in changing jobs due to either employer not sponsoring for h1 or the delay in the overall process of transfers of h1 is making it difficult to settle down in one place for a stable education for kids.”*

*“We have not been able to make solid future plans due to so many uncertainties around green card backlog and visa issues. We have not been able to purchase house and fulfill our other needs as uncertainties around our stay here always keeps us lingering in the middle.”*

Participants also expressed that the green card waiting time is causing **travel issues** both professionally and personally. For example, some participants noted:

*“It is hampering my personal and professional growth. I'm looking to invest here and become a successful businessman while having my current day job but unable to do so. Also, when I had a family emergency this year, I was stuck with transfer of visa for 2 months. Without pay. It was only after getting approval and getting stamping done, I could come back to my life here in the United States. Which includes a home I've invested in.”*

*“I've been in US since 2007, my priority date is Aug 2011, I didn't go India since then because of Visa may or may not issued at the consulate, lost lot of personal relations in India because not visited for the last almost 12 years”*

*“Cannot go India to see my sick parents. My father in law died in January, my husband was not able to see him last time. My kids are studying here if he will stuck there we have to move immediately and it would be adverse effect on my kids life .we will lose job ,education time everything”*

*“My Father in law passed away and we couldn't go and at least see him one last time. The wait time for visa stamping is 3 and half months and would lose my job if I intend to take a leave of 3 1/2 months. After working for a decade here i still have no idea when my world will be turned upside down and in 1 day”*

Participants also mentioned that their children are **ageing out** which will place them on F1 status (international student Visa status) from H4 status (dependent visa status) once they turn 21 years of age. This is not only causing financial burden (due to paying international fees with high rates of interest) but also is putting the immigrant children's future in jeopardy. As some participants noted:

*“I have been living here in US since 2007 with over 30 years of IT and Bioinformatics experience. **One of my daughters aged out, she had to change her visa from H4 to F1 and paying international fee by borrowing personal loans with interest up-to 28%. I spend most of my salary for paying loan installments.** We could not visit India when my father-in-law died since our visa renewal was in pending. My father expired four days ago, I could not visit India due to financial issue, also scared of visa renewal at India. One has to plan at least a month before visa renewal at US embassy in India. **My younger daughter is at High School, she will face lot of financial challenges for her college education. She will not be eligible for educational loan or scholarship.**”*

*“My son is right now in 11th grade and daughter in 9th. I am very concerned and scared about my sons college admission as he will be treated as an international student. Even though he studied in US from kindergarten onwards. He will not be eligible for any financial aid. Financial aid is given only for GCholders and citizens. Also the biggest concern is he will be forced to go to F1 visa status. Same situation for my daughter too. She studied in US*

*from Pre Kindergarten to grade 9. I have already spoken to my children to study undergraduate courses in some more immigrant friendly country where there is a possibility of getting quicker GC like Canada, Germany, France, Switzerland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia but they don't prefer to do that as they have all their friends here in US and they want to continue being together in US."*

*"I have a priority date in 2016. I may never get my GC without changes to the current law. I am more worried about my son who is 12 years old who will age out in 8 years. I can always go back to India for living but my kids will find it difficult to adjust to the culture and environment. Last time when we went to India, he was never able to adjust to the local environment for the entire vacation. He got fever multiple times. I feel I am sacrificing his future for my present. My kid should have the option to stay in US as he calls this country as home."*

*"I have a 13 year old son who was born in India but raised here in the US ever since he was 3 years old. He is on a dependent VISA and will lose his eligibility to stay in the US once he turns 21. This means, if I (and my son) does not have a green card before he turns 21 he will be forced to go back to India where he has never lived for more than few months of his infant life (we were in the UK for 2 years beginning from when he was 8 months old)."*

Many participants also highlighted that the Trump administration's proposed **revocation of the work permit of H4-EAD** (Dependent visa) will severely impact their lives:

*"My life is almost ruined due to green card wait. I came here to study got my MS and now stuck with H4 where no certainty even for EAD. My marriage is almost verge of end due to financial and mental pressure. I haven't visited my parents for 8 years in a fear what if I got stuck and my 10 years old son who is US citizen will have no where to go. I worked all my life so hard and contributed in research to this country but what I got a miserable life, sleepless night, fear for my innocent sons future and tear in eyes to serve my old parents. Moving to US feels now a worst decision of my life."*

*"I am a Masters and PhD graduate from A highly ranked university in US. I am currently working as a research fellow in a federal institute in US on H-4EAD. me and my husband filed for green card in 2012 and we are still out of hope to receive it any time soon. Federal institute don't file for H-1B and I cannot get promoted as the positions above me are only open for Green card holders or US citizens. I am badly stuck in the same position from last 4 years. Now if H-4EAD is revoked, then I will lose this highly reputed job. what a waste of talent, training, education and a human life!?"*

*“As a dependent spouse, I am fully financially dependent on my husband. We have lived here for over 10 years now and there is still no sense of permanency. In this day and age, being completely dependent on one's spouse is depressing and deeply hurts the self-esteem, especially for over 10 years, and with no end in sight. I would like to take care of my ageing parents and the least I can do is visit them and send them some money to take care of their financial needs. Due to our visa situation, I am unable to visit them freely without worrying about renewals and stamping procedures. I also have a small child to take care of and I feel like I am forced to choose between my family and my parents because of the visa renewal issues. **Thanks to the H4EAD, I am now able to help my parents financially because I can now work. It is the least I can do. But even the H4EAD is in question.** We are just people who have followed the law to create better opportunities for ourselves through our skills. Constant delays and changing rules are causing a lot of anxiety. After having invested so many years in one country, how can we just uproot ourselves and move to another country? We have a child who is a US citizen and we are trying our best to take care of him and instill everything American in him. If we move to another country and another culture, he will grow up with kids who may not understand his American culture. How will we be able to raise him as an American with American values? The green card delays affect every family very deeply and this issue must be resolved at the earliest.”*

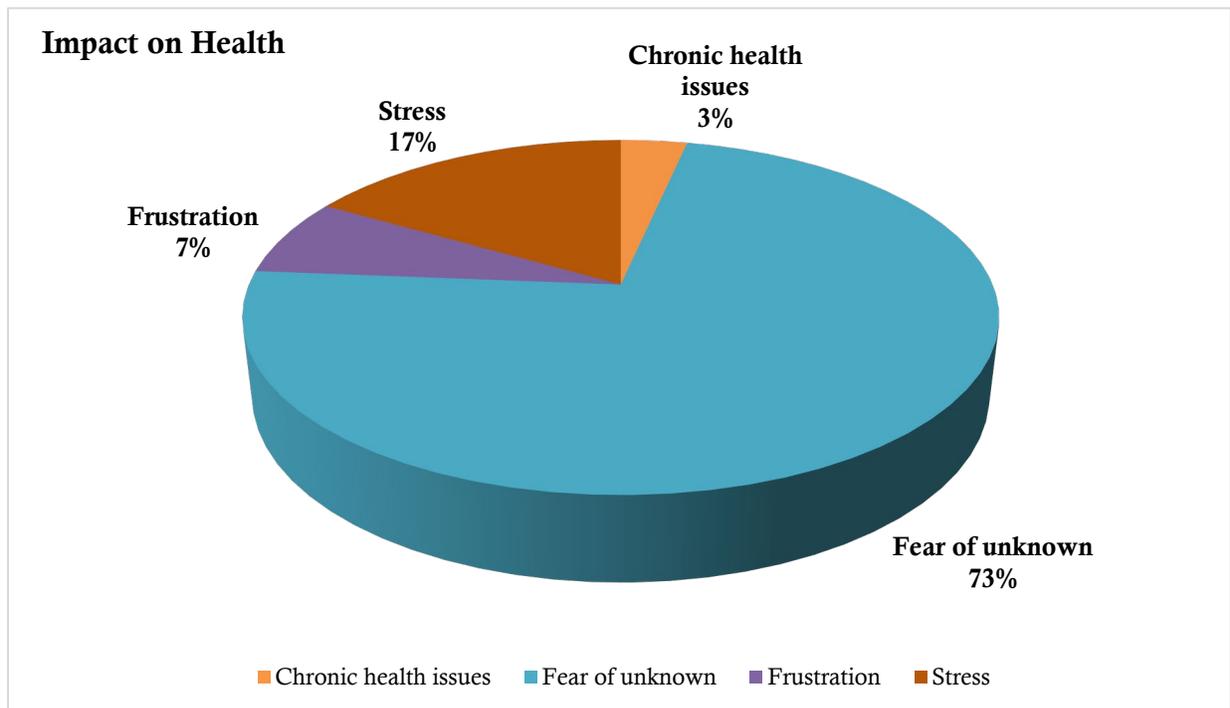
Participants also mentioned that the green card waiting time is causing numerous **family issues** that have already resulted in couples living in different states. As some participants highlighted:

*“Because of this delay, and jobs **my family is separated** and going very bad situation leaving kids at one place and staying at another city for work”*

*“I am working in Chicago and my family is in Denver. I can only see them twice a month. I keep traveling back and forth. In case of emergency it is nightmare which I am facing almost for 2 years.”*

*“I travel significantly for work and this puts a lot of focus with current changing rules. My Spouse is on h4 EAD and the current struggle adds to uneasiness especially when she wants to grow or change jobs. This creates a tough situation at home as we are constantly concerned about where she can continue her career without constant struggles from both employment and personal satisfaction at work. We could potentially run into a situation where we will have to live apart to maintain our legal status and not impact GC process.”*

The critical issues discussed in the previous section have had a negative impact on the wellbeing of Indian immigrants. Through content analysis of survey responses, we identified four main issues faced by this population in their personal life due to the long green card waiting time: fear of unknown, stress, frustration, and more severe chronic health issues (Figure 7).



*Figure 7.* Impact of health – analyzed using responses from open-ended question

Participants mentioned that the long waiting time plagued with recent proposed policy changes is contributing to the feeling of **constant fear of unknown**. This fear is due to the “uncertainty” with respect to their future and “feeling stuck” with no career progression. As some participants noted:

***“I live in constant danger of losing my ability to stay & work in US. I plan things on a day to day basis & wake up feeling that I have another day to stay & work in US. At times I feel why I should take all the pressure & associated insecurities, in spite of having a Ph D degree & work for R&D in a global Pharma company. I came here with the American dream in mind, but my life here is turning into an American nightmare.*”**

***“Feel like a sword hanging above my neck all the time. I don't feel secure in my job and feel like I can lose my cars, house, stability anytime based on employer or country dynamics. I am not able to earn better for my family or grow in career due to restrictions with promotion or changing jobs.”***

***“We have been waiting for 6 years. Our daughter is born here. I have personally trained 4-5 co American workers on technology and helped them to advance in their careers. My wife is also doing her masters here besides working and contributing to the economy. We also made financial investments. We are under constant fear that we may be asked to leave everything behind and go.”***

Participants also expressed that the uncertainties surrounding green card waiting time is causing them stress and frustration. With respect to **stress**, some participants noted:

***“A close family member died recently and I had to travel to India in an emergency. Even in the bereavement period, I had to take care of visa renewal and stamping so that I could get back to my job in the US. I have lived in the United States for over 10 years now, and I am over 40 years old. I feel stuck, unable to change employers, not eligible for promotions, unable to make concrete investments in the US for my family. It is causing me a lot of anxiety and depression and I have to muster all my strength to keep myself going. The question on my mind is always - Will this ever end? I see people from other nationalities who get green cards within an year, while I am still waiting after 10 years, and my spouse is completely dependent on me financially since 10 years. If it was anyone else in my spouse's place, we would have divorced by now. I cannot explain the pain in words.”***

***“Our family is leading a life of complete insecurity, stress, dependency with financial constraints. With long and never ending wait for green card with i140 approved in 2010, we are not able to take so many decisions of buying big house, planning international vacations, going to see family in India etc”***

***“I'm in US for over 10 years now. I've been through very stressful situations many times due to many things such as Visa renewals, Visa stamping, travel***

*plans, spouse's ability to work, family plans and financial stressful. Also, at times it feels that companies take advantage due to Visa issues. Life has been stagnant and hoping for situation to improve.”*

***“This GC wait is extremely stressful. To the extent that I am concerned about my health due to excessive tension. Every time USCIS release a new rule it makes it harder to have a happy existence in the US. It seems that USCIS is dedicated to making it tougher for legal immigrants to live and prosper in the US.”***

***“This has caused a lot of stress on my family as we have no definitive answer. It makes things tough to even take a break for family purpose”***

With respect to **frustration**, some participants highlighted:

***“We have been here in the states well over a decade (me -13 yrs and my wife 10 yrs). We both have masters from US universities and are struggling to get ahead with our careers. 60-70% of the companies do not even consider our resume if they hear that we need visa sponsorship. Careers are basically stagnated with Insecurity and Frustration building up.”***

***“I have been in US for 12 years and waiting for GC since 2012 on EB2. I am frustrated with the wait and constant visa stamping, RFE and hassles. Have to compromise on visiting family in India.”***

***“I have no possibility of moving up in the current company I am working for and my employer is taking advantage of my situation and not paying me enough. But I am afraid to move to another company because I have to transfer my H1B. There are a lot of denials for H1B transfers these days. I also will have to move my approved I140 which is another hassle. So, I am staying put in this company at this dead end job. It has almost 7 years since I last visited India and I cannot go because I have to go for visa stamping at a consulate in India and it might get rejected. These situations are really frustrating.”***

***“It’s frustrating to wait for the priority to date to be current and being abused by an employer who is taking advantage of situation. It is not fair, despite of studying in US, having highest degree in the field, follow all the rules and paying taxes still have to go through this. It is very sad”***

***“Green card delay is frustrating and should be solved with a proper solution but HR392 will make things worse not only for one country but also for all the countries and immigrants. Now we have problem with India and China and I think it should be fixed but if HR392 passes, all the countries will have the same problem and I think it is not fair to make the problem worse to just save immigrants from only one country”***

***“I am tied up to my employer since a decade now. Feels like my work life is not in my control. Because of the visa issues I cannot choose a job, cannot be available for family emergencies. Not able to pursue my dreams. I like to travel around the world and visit different countries but this visa issue is restricting me to travel. All I have to do is travel with in the US in whatever short vacation I get in that year. My parents, it’s hard to explain them about this immigration policies and I am tired to justify when I say I love them and miss them but I don’t visit them when they need me the most. My father was not well last month, he met with an accident and was hospitalized being the only son I cannot travel to India as my visa extension process is on at that time. Very very frustrating to see your aged mom alone in the difficult situation. After waiting for a decade and facing uncertainty at work and also in work life I now feel is it worth waiting and making all the sacrifices. Need justice.”***

Participants also mentioned that they are suffering from severe **chronic health issues** due to green card backlog:

***“I have 2 US born kids and have invested in home. Living here since 2007 and still cannot call this place my home. Green card backlog impacts my work life and personal life.. it also affects my wife’s personal and professional life. I have been diagnosed with high blood pressure and high cholesterol in the last 2 years. This is enormously stressful situation for my entire family. I visited India 4 years ago and have been delaying my travel only with the hope that i would travel after I get my green card which is a distant dream now. I have not been comfortable to plan my India travel as I cannot risk my investment that I have done here and We have given this country our valuable 10 years. It’s not easy to make a decision to move out of the country. I never expected even in my wildest dream that I would be juggling with archaic legal immigration system in one of the developed countries of this world. I still don’t believe that US plans to rescind a H4EAD program (over 90% women) in this 21st century. We are still appalled that we had a approved I140 for over 7 years now and have a indefinite wait to even be anywhere close to gaining access to our green card ? What is our fault ? That we were born in a highly populated country ? Did we choose to be born in India ? We following every legal protocol of this country and have reached this position due to our skills. We don’t deserve this ill treatment. Our kids don’t deserve this!! Kids of highskilled immigrants are slowly getting exposed to green card backlog and H4EAD rescind issue. They already view themselves different***

*than other peer kids. How can we even let these little minds struggle with this uncertainty? This is completely unfair and an issue which is being ignored for decades now. This has to stop, this really should end before a devastating consequence.”*

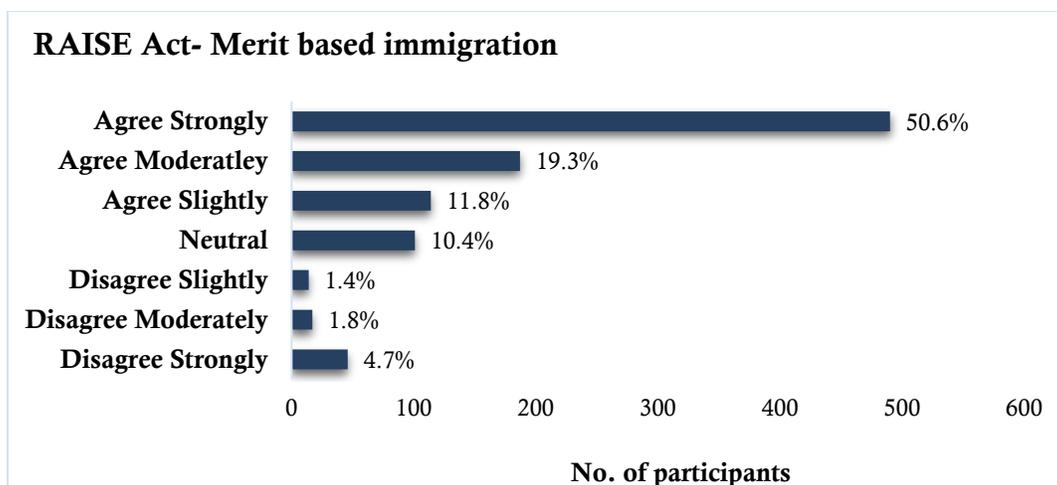
***“Husband suffering depression, kids having anxiety for their future, I am always anxious of losing everything and going back to India. For kids it is like severing their roots. They have always considered US as their country. They will be devastated and this will break us.”***

***“I have multiple chronic health problems that started in last few years and staying in limbo with GC add more pain to it.”***

In recent times, the current Trump administration has proposed a new policy RAISE Act, a merit-based immigration system that gives preference to skilled immigrants based on their educational qualification and age. This Act may help these highly skilled immigrants to receive their green card in a short period of time and prevent delays. We discuss this policy in detail in the next section.

#### **PERSPECTIVES REGARDING FUTURE POLICY – RAISE ACT**

In the present study, we also asked participants to share their views on the new policy RAISE Act, a merit-based immigration system proposed by the current Trump administration. Responses on a seven-point scale were used to gauge the level of agreement/disagreement regarding this new policy. We further asked participants their view on the proposed merit-based immigration system via an open-ended question. Our results show that Indian immigrants strongly agree with the RAISE Act (Figure 8).



*Figure 8. The Trump administration has proposed a merit-based immigration system (RAISE; Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment) Act), where the green card system would use points to determine who can immigrate to and live in US. Highly-skilled workers are most desirable under the proposed program. Of the 969 participants, 490 (50.6%) agree strongly, 187 (19.3%) agree moderately, and 114 (11.8%) participants agree slightly with this statement. Therefore, 50.6% of the participants agree strongly support the proposed merit-based immigration system.*

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**OPEN ENDED ITEM: PLEASE BRIEFLY SHARE/EXPLAIN YOUR PERSONAL VIEWS ON THIS NEW RAISE ACT POLICY.**

We had 485 participants respond with their views on the new RAISE Act. Our results show that majority of the participants are in agreement with the RAISE Act, and that it would give priority to skilled immigrants based on their educational qualification and age. They felt that this Act would reform the current archaic immigration system (which uses country cap) and help accelerate innovation. Some participants also mentioned that the RAISE Act would **help reduce fraud that has plagued the H-1B program** in the past. As some participants noted:

*“This policy will create a level playing field for all high skilled immigrants as opposed to discrimination based on country of birth.”*

*“RAISE will allow best and brightest to come, work and stay in US without being tortured and exploited by their employers. It will also help in reducing any kind of Visa-abuse as employers will not have any extra advantage from hiring people from one country over other.”*

However, many participants are concerned that the proposed **RAISE Act does not consider older skilled employees who have already spent a large part of their career working in the US.** They expressed that the new policy does not address the issue of clearing the green card backlog (that is people who are still waiting for their green card for more than a decade). As some respondents noted:

*“The RAISE Act does nothing for people like me who are over 40 years old and working in the United States on a skill-based visa. I have spent a large chunk of my career in the US, paid taxes, followed the law - but I am still invisible to the lawmakers who decide my fate.”*

*“The trump points system considers age as a strong factor. This would not make sense to people who are in waiting for more than a decade. They would have got old and lose significant points due to that. The green card backlog should be cleared before implementing the proposed rule”*

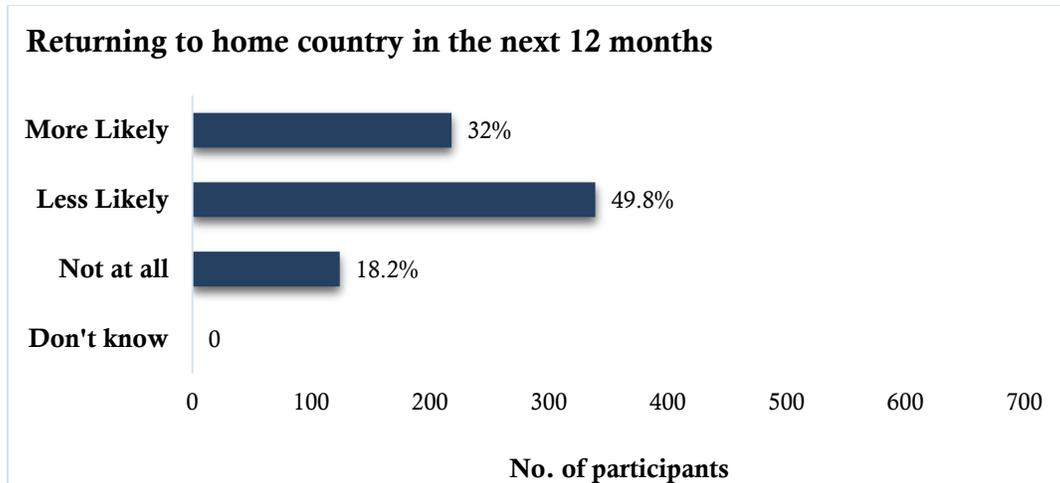
*“The new system should have a "as of start date" and a plan to address the "backlog". Few of my personal thoughts around this - Option 1: Eliminate Back-Log and Merit-based as of 2018 (combo of H.R.392/S.281 with S.354): Let us say all new green card application as of 2018 should follow merit-based approach. For the existing backlog, one of the aspects of the RAISE Act is to reduce diversity and family-based green cards, so how about these reductions be directed to clear the backlog of existing high skilled immigrants waiting for their green cards for decades or pass H.R.392/S.281 bills that can address the backlog. The immigrants waiting in this queue are highly qualified, paid taxes, have homes, speak English, can contribute immensely by opening businesses and can drive more job creation. This re-direction of green cards can be done for few years before all the back-log is eliminated and you are caught up to the merit-based system.”*

Taken together, our results show that Indian immigrants strongly agree with the RAISE Act. However, many are skeptical as to how the American administration will deal with older skilled employees who have already spent a large part of their career working in the US.

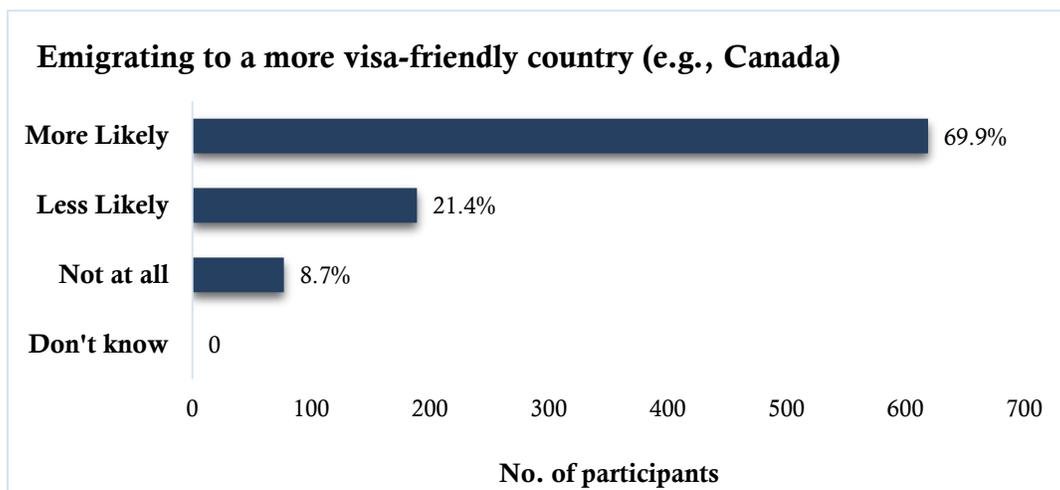
**REPATRIATION AND EMIGRATION INTENTIONS**

We evaluated participants' repatriation and emigration intentions by asking if, while considering the impending/new policy changes or green card backlog situation in the USA, they are seriously thinking about (a) returning to their home country in the next 12 months or (b) emigrating to a more visa friendly country (e.g., Canada) in the next 12 months. A four-point response scale of likelihood was used to gauge these perceptions, ranging from 1=Not at all to 4=More Likely (a "Don't know" option was also provided). Furthermore, we asked participants if they were looking at work opportunities in their home country India or if they have applied/obtained permanent residency in a more-visa friendly country (e.g., Canada). Participants responded to these questions using options "Yes" and "No", coded as "1" and "2" respectively.

Responses from 1021-1023 participants (depending on question) indicated that 32% of these individuals were seriously thinking of returning to their home country in the next 12 months (Figure 9) and 70% participants were seriously thinking of emigrating to a more visa-friendly country in the next 12 months (Figure 10). Also, 262 (roughly 26%) were already looking for work opportunities in the home country India, 310 (roughly 30%) had already applied to obtain permanent residency in a more visa-friendly country and 90 (roughly 9%) had already obtained permanent residency in visa-friendly country



*Figure 9. I am seriously thinking about returning to my home country (India) within the next 12 months.* Of the 681 participants, 339 (49.8%) were less likely, and 218 (32%) were more likely seriously thinking of returning to their home country India in the next 12 months.



*Figure 10. I am seriously thinking about emigrating to other more visa-friendly country (e.g., Canada) within the next 12 months.* Of the 885 participants, 619 (69.9%) were more likely, and 189 (21.4%) were less likely seriously thinking of returning to a more visa friendly country in the next 12 months.

## DISCUSSION

The present study was undertaken to highlight the impact of green card waiting time on the lives of Indian immigrants in the US. Using quantitative and qualitative data, we further estimate the direct and indirect costs associated with the delay in receiving the green card. Our findings clearly indicate that our Indian immigrant participants (93.4%; Figure 1) are very concerned about the estimated green card waiting time. Quantitative results (see Table 1) show that the delay in receiving green card is negatively affecting aspects of the work and family/nonwork life of Indian immigrants. With respect to work life, we found a substantial percentage of participants to suffer from wage stagnation, job insecurity, and lack of career promotion opportunities. Additionally, the delay in green card processing is also causing financial burden and negatively impacting business travel opportunities and preventing them from visiting their family in India in case of emergencies.

Using the Nvivo 12 software, we further analyzed the qualitative responses from participants to several of the topics examined in this study. Through these responses, participants further emphasized that they face critical issues (see Figure 6) such as career roadblocks, financial insecurities, travel issues (both business and personal), family issues, kids ageing out and H4-EAD (dependent spouse) issues. These critical issues are in turn contributing to health issues such as constant fear of unknown (uncertainty and feeling stuck issues due to GC backlog), stress, frustration and chronic health issues (Figure 7).

These issues faced by immigrants in their work and family/nonwork life can be explained through a spillover effect model in which experiences in a work role positively or negatively affect one's experiences in family/nonwork roles and vice versa (Burke & Greenglass, 1987). The current employment status of our participants (defined by temporary visa status H-1B visa,

etc. and currently waiting for Green card approval) is causing work issues such as wage stagnation, lack of promotion opportunities, job insecurities, business travel issues, and inability to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. This, in turn, is resulting in health issues such as constant fear of unknown, stress, frustration and chronic health issues in personal life.

Additionally, the complications created in Indian immigrants' personal lives by current USCIS policy changes (e.g., rescinding of H4-EAD, financial insecurities, kids ageing out, and travel difficulties in case of family emergencies in India) may be negatively impacting the work life of these valuable workers. This assertion is in line with previous research where conflicts related to work and family demands have had negative impact on health (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1995). Previous research has also shown that work restrictions related to spouse employment status (H4-EAD visa, dependent visa) created complications in personal life of Indian immigrants, which interfered with their work life resulting in lower overall life satisfaction (Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2018). In sum, our present findings not only reflect these results, but also for the first time bring to light other pressing work and personal issues faced by Indian immigrants waiting for their green card approval.

### **BROADER IMPLICATIONS**

Beyond the personal impacts already discussed, there are significant financial implications of the present situation involving this group of immigrants within the US. The combination of work and family/nonwork struggles these individuals are managing may very likely contribute to direct and indirect losses to businesses and the broader US (possibly world) economy. Direct losses in organizations include costs associated with turnover of employees (e.g., Nowak & Linder, 2016) whereas indirect losses include costs associated with reduction of productivity, performance, and diminished employee self-esteem (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

Research has shown that immigrants are already more prone to experiencing excessive demands in both work and personal life. This is because they have to live and work in a new cultural environment, and therefore any work or personal issue can have a significant impact on work performance and length of stay in the host country (Osland, 1995).

In the present study, these challenges are exacerbated by the current challenges associated with USCIS processing. As a result, we found that 70% of respondents (see Figure 10) to our survey are more likely (now than in the past) seriously thinking about emigrating to a more visa-friendly country. This is in line with recent reports on 200% increase in Indian invitees for permanent residency in Canada (Business Today, 2018). We also found that 30% of the participants have already applied for permanent residency in a visa friendly country (Figure 9) and 9% of the participants have already obtained a permanent residency in a visa-friendly country. Based on these turnover intentions of Indian immigrants, we estimate the direct cost (cost of turnover) by using the forecasting technique and discuss the indirect cost to organizations in the following section.

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#### **ESTIMATING DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS TO AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS.**

In this subsection, we illustrate the potential magnitude of direct financial losses to organizations in the US based on the turnover intentions of participants. From the quantitative data we collected, we find 70% of the total Indian immigrant population in the US are more likely seriously thinking about emigrating to a more visa-friendly country within the next 12 months (see Figure 10). Additionally, participants facing work and family/nonwork issues due to green card waiting time have shown to be positively associated with repatriation (i.e., seriously thinking of returning to home country India within the next 12 months) and emigration (i.e.,

seriously thinking of emigrating to a more visa-friendly country within the next 12 months) intentions.

Currently, there are 306,400 working Indian immigrants in the US waiting for their green card; 70% of this population is 214,480 (CATO Institute, 2018). The minimum median salary for H-1B workers of \$60,000 is set as a requirement per law (US Department of Labor, n. d., “Overview”). We can also consider the median salary range for all occupations in which Indian immigrants are working to be \$60,000 - \$158,120. Without factoring in additional costs associated with replacement, retraining, and lost productivity, and using this range of median salaries, the potential 1-year value lost if 214,480 of the present Indian immigrants in the US were to act on the intentions observed in this study and actually leave the US over its current immigration challenges would be between \$12,868,800,000 and \$33,913,577,600. The total direct replacement cost for these workers (estimated at 50-60% of an employee’s annual salary) would potentially be in the range of \$6,434,400,000 to \$20,348,146,560. Combined, the total direct turnover cost to organization in the US is estimated to be in the range \$19,303,200,000 - \$54,261,724,160 (Table 3).

Although this estimated cost seems huge at first glance, we believe that this estimate may actually be conservative. Other researchers have calculated the cost of international assignment (an engineer sent on assignment from Germany to China) and found the total cost to be €432,000 for 24-month period per person (Nowak & Linder, 2016). This is also because these immigrants are highly skilled and occupy key positions. Therefore, replacing them will be difficult and costly given that there is already shortage of STEM skills among the American population (Forbes, 2018). Also, 69% of the overall American population (age 25 and older) lacked a

bachelor's degree in 2016 (US Census Bureau, 2016). Furthermore, we have not considered the impact of these job losses on the housing market, which could increase this estimated cost range.

	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Median pay range - Computer and IT occupations in US</b> <a href="https://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/home.htm">https://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/home.htm</a> <a href="https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/computer-and-information-systems-managers.htm#tab-8">https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/computer-and-information-systems-managers.htm#tab-8</a>	\$60,000	\$115,120
<b>Median pay range - Health care</b> <i>Minimum pay defined by H-1B minimum wage requirement as per law - \$60K</i> <a href="https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home.htm">https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home.htm</a>	\$60,000	\$158,120
<b>Median pay range - Business</b> <i>Minimum pay defined by H-1B minimum wage requirement as per law - \$60K</i> <a href="https://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/home.htm">https://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/home.htm</a>	\$60,000	\$90,640
<b>Final median range considering all above occupations</b> 70% of the total working immigrants waiting for a green card (306,400) = 214,480	\$60,000	\$158,120
<b>Loss in value to US organizations based on median salary (Min x 214,480; Max x 214,480)</b> <b>60,000 x 214,480 = 12,868,800,000; 158,120 x 214,480 = 33,913,577,600</b>	\$12,868,800,000	\$33,913,577,600
<b>Cost to replace departing employees in highly skilled occupations</b> Total direct replacement cost (Direct replacement cost 50-60% of an employee's annual salary) <a href="https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/special-reports-and-expert-views/Documents/Retaining-Talent.pdf">https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/special-reports-and-expert-views/Documents/Retaining-Talent.pdf</a>	+	+
<b>50% x 12,868,800,00 = 6,434,400,000; 60% x 33,913,577,600 = 20,348,146,560</b>	\$6,434,400,000	\$20,348,146,560
<b>Total direct cost to organizations in US = Estimated loss of value to the US organization + Total estimated direct replacement cost</b>	<b>\$19,303,200,000</b>	<b>\$54,261,724,160</b>

Table 3. Turnover intentions - Total direct cost to organization in US

In addition to direct losses, the work and family issues caused due to green card waiting time could result in indirect losses to organizations. Emigration of these skilled immigrants to a more visa-friendly country creates brain drain and loss of talent (e.g., Bloomberg Businessweek, 2018). Work issues (job insecurity, wage stagnation, lack of promotion opportunities, business travel issues and inability to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities) and personal issues (financial insecurities, personal travel issues, and health issues such as stress, fear of unknown, frustration and chronic health issues) discussed in the present study may lead to burnout which in turn may lead to indirect losses such as low performance and productivity, lack of innovation and organizational commitment.

Burnout within this population is also a potential consequence associated with the chronic nature of immigration-related uncertainty. Burnout is defined using dimensions emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Emotional exhaustion refers to “general feeling of extreme chronic fatigue” and cynicism is defined as “callous, distanced and cynical attitude toward the work itself or the people with whom one works.” (Bakker, Van Emmerik, & Van Riet, 2008, p. 310). Further, burnout has been positively associated with stress, health problems and negatively associated with job satisfaction and performance (Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, & Blix, 1994). For example, among health professionals, burnout has been positively associated with medical errors (Shanafelt, Bradley, Wipf, & Back, 2002), sleep deprivation (Vela-Bueno et al., 2008), poor quality of care (Shirom, Nirel, & Vinokur, 2006) and low ratings of patient satisfaction (Vahey, Aiken, Sloane, Clarke, & Vargas, 2004). Therefore, even if these immigrants choose to stay with their employers, the emotional exhaustion and cynicism caused due to burnout may negatively affect the overall performance and productivity of organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study bring to light the impacts of the current green card waiting times and USCIS processing issues on the work and nonwork lives of Indian immigrants in the US. More specifically, using quantitative and qualitative data, we highlight work and nonwork/family issues being experienced by these highly skilled immigrants. Furthermore, we discuss the impact of these issues on the overall wellbeing of these individuals which in turn help us estimate the direct and indirect costs associated with the delay in receiving the green card. Based on these findings, we argue there is an urgent need to revamp the current American immigration system for highly skilled immigrants. We hope that the present study may help the US organizations and the current presidential administration to take note of the implications of the green card delays and other visa-related proposed policy changes. In the future, we also hope policy makers and researchers will more fully consider the implications of immigration-related policies and procedures on immigrants, their spouses and families, and broader communities.

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