


Public universities: Curfew for women, freedom for men?

Female students say unequal rules cost them campus life, jobs and independence

10 HOUR(S) AGO EDUCATION

SHARE 

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Kasirah Sultana's* mother travelled more than 300 kilometres from Dinajpur to Dhaka University to surprise her daughter with her favourite meal. She reached Rukayyah Hall at 10:58pm -- nearly an hour after the gates had closed -- but was denied entry. Kasirah, a resident of the hall, was not allowed to go outside to meet her either.

Around the same time, a male student living in a nearby hall stepped out of his residence for a walk on campus. Male students at Dhaka University can enter and leave their halls at any hour.

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This stark contrast reflects a broader pattern. Across public universities in Bangladesh, female students routinely face stricter restrictions than their male peers, limiting not only their movement but also their access to work, campus life, and social interactions.

While DU formally enforces a 10:00pm deadline to return to halls for female students, often extended informally to around 11:00pm, many other public universities impose tighter deadlines. At several institutions, female students must return by 8:00pm or 9:00pm, with penalties for late entry ranging from warnings to administrative action.

Interviews with more than 20 female students from DU, Khulna University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), and Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University (MBSTU) suggest that these rules are both widely enforced and unevenly applied, compared to the unrestricted access granted to male students.

INCOME AT STAKE

For many students from middle- and lower-income backgrounds, private tutoring and part-time work are essential sources of income. But strict curfews make it difficult for female students to continue such jobs.

Afrin, a student at KU, said most tutoring opportunities take place in the late afternoon or evening, after classes end around 4:00pm or 5:00pm. However, traffic congestion in the city often makes it impossible to return before the 8:00pm or 9:00pm deadlines.

“Some of my friends had to quit their tutoring jobs because they couldn’t make it back in time,” she said.

Students at MBSTU in Tangail described similar challenges. Liza, a resident of Fajilatunnesa Joha Hall, said travelling to town for tutoring is time-consuming, leaving little margin to meet the deadline.

“Students whose classes end in the afternoon often struggle to return before the deadline,” she said.

Neha, another student, added that attempts to contact hall authorities for late entry approval often go unanswered, leaving students stranded outside.

The restrictions have also cost students formal job opportunities. Kasirah said she had to decline a position at a fashion house because it required work until 9:30pm, making it impossible to return to her hall on time.

CAMPUS LIFE CURTAILED

Beyond income, students say the current system limits their participation in campus life.

Female students are often prohibited from entering other women’s halls, even for routine visits. Nuzia Hasin Rasha, former president of Revolutionary Students Unity at DU, criticised the policy as discriminatory.

“Male students face no such restrictions,” she said. “These rules isolate female students and restrict their social and academic engagement.”

Extracurricular activities are also affected. Ruma, a student at SUST, said involvement in clubs and campus events has declined among female students as curfew enforcement has tightened in recent years.

“Events often run into the evening, and many students choose not to participate because they won’t be able to return on time,” she said.

Female students, including Saima Azam Mridula of DU’s Kobi Sufia Kamal Hall, also criticised the prior-approval system for late entry as impractical, arguing that it is difficult to predict emergencies or delays in advance.

SAFETY CONCERNS

University authorities defend the restrictions as necessary for safety reasons.

Prof Salma Nasrin, provost of Kobi Sufia Kamal Hall at DU, said there is little need to extend the current deadline.

“The system already allows some flexibility, including late-entry permission in special cases,” she said. “Extending the deadline further may only push students to return even later.”

Prof Hosne Ara Begum, provost of Rukayyah Hall, also cited security concerns.

“Given the current social environment, we cannot guarantee complete safety for female students late at night,” she said. “Until conditions improve, extending hours may not be advisable.”

However, in the event of an emergency, the local guardian can come under the established rules and, if necessary, take the student home, she added.

Sk Faijan Bin Halim, assistant provost of Aparajita Hall at KU, and Sabiha Afrin Begum, provost of Sirajunnesa Chowdhury Hall at SUST, said their night-time hall entry deadline is aimed at ensuring student safety. However, they allow late entry and exceptions in certain cases, and do not involve character shaming of students who return after the deadline.

POLICING BEHAVIOUR

However, students argue that enforcement often goes beyond safety concerns and involves intrusive monitoring and moral judgement.

Samira Farjana, a former SUST student, recalled that hall authorities would sometimes admonish students, saying, “Good girls don’t stay out late.”

Others reported more suggestive remarks. “We know what you do late at night,” a provost allegedly told students, according to Ruma.

Students from KU and MBSTU described similar experiences, saying such comments made them feel humiliated and discouraged them from staying in university halls. Some students have chosen to move into rented accommodation to avoid such situations, despite the additional financial burden.

Students across the universities said they want more flexible and equitable policies that reflect their academic, economic, and personal needs. They also called for simpler procedures for late entry, especially in emergency situations.

The rules, authorities say, are about safety. Students say they come at the cost of income loss, curtailed campus and social life and independence.

[Names have been changed or withheld to protect the privacy and safety of those interviewed, with the exceptions of Saima Azam Mridula, Samira Farjana and Kasirah Sultana, who chose to speak on the record. Student leader Nuzia Hasin Rasha also spoke on the record.]