

The damage is not limited to inconvenience. For many students, private tutoring and part-time work are what make university life financially possible. Classes often end in the late afternoon. Tutoring happens in the evening. Traffic does not respect the closing times of hall gates. Students quoted in news reports described friends having to quit tutoring because they could not get back on time. One DU student said she had to turn down a job at a fashion house because the workday ended at 9:30 pm. It is hard to speak grandly about women's empowerment while accepting rules that make women's income more inaccessible by design.

Then there is the cost that is harder to quantify but no less real. University life is an entire experience in itself that does not necessarily end with lectures. It continues with club meetings, rehearsals, debates, seminars, conversations, organising events, and the friendships that make a campus feel inhabited. Female students said curfews and restrictions to access cut them off from these spaces as well. At DU, women have also objected to being unable to enter other women's halls, while men generally move across male dormitories with a much greater ease. An education that trains women to watch the clock more than the world around them is not equal.

Hall authorities defend these restrictions in the name of safety. That concern cannot be brushed aside. Bangladesh is not a safe country for women after dark, or even in broad daylight. But if the campus and cities are unsafe, why is the solution restricting women's movement instead of increasing institutional responsibility? Why does danger become a reason to contain women rather than a reason to fix transport, lighting, complaint mechanisms, security response, and hall access procedures?

What many students describe is not just security management but behavioural policing.

I remember an incident involving one of my seniors who was shamed for staying out past 8:00 pm and was granted access only after signing a muchleka (bond). A former SUST student quoted in a news report recalled hall authorities telling students that "good girls don't stay out late." Others described remarks that carried the same policing in different tones. Once a university starts judging female students by the hour at which they return to their dormitories, it moves from protecting students to training them into obedience. A curfew justified as care can still operate as control.

The reported DU incidents make the problem even harder to dismiss as a matter of official hall timings alone. In September 2025, two female students were reportedly stopped from entering the Mall Chattar area at 10:38 pm, despite having presented their IDs. The staff allegedly told them there were "orders from above." The proctor later said no such directive had been issued and expressed regret. That exposed something more troubling: women on campus can be restricted by instructions that seem to exist only at the gate, not even on paper.

The same pattern resurfaced in January 2026, when female students alleged that they were being barred from entering Central Field after evening hours based on verbal instructions, even though the university authorities and Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducusu) representatives denied any formal policy. This is how arbitrary control survives. No one owns the rule, yet someone enforces it. No one signs the order, yet women are expected to obey it.

That is why token gestures ring hollow. Reports on DU's "Women Student Day" described how female students were allowed to remain outside dormitories after 10:00 pm for one night in July 2025, only for many to protest what they saw as symbolism without structural change. They were right to object. Freedom granted for an evening is not freedom but permission that can always be withdrawn.

The female students' demands recorded in the reports are practical: keep late gates functional, allow ID-based entry, make room for work commitments, medical needs, late returns from home, and emergencies, and stop turning every delayed return into a lecture on character. None of this is radical. What is radical is the idea that adult women at a public university should have to negotiate their dignity at a gate.

A university is supposed to widen the scope of one's life. It should not teach women that access to education comes with a smaller map of movement than the one offered to their male counterparts. If public universities cannot imagine women as adults who study, work, return late, help friends, attend events, and move through campus without suspicion, then the problem is not women's safety. It is the institution's understanding of freedom. A university cannot educate women while locking them in.

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