Journal of Social Science DIU

Commuting Uncertainty and Psychological Distress among First-Year University Students in Dhaka

Samuel Okafor
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Abstract

Students who commute across Dhaka face uncertain journey times that may complicate adjustment to university life. This study examines whether unpredictability in daily travel is associated with psychological distress during the first academic semester. A panel of 412 first-year students at three universities completed fortnightly travel diaries and three administrations of a validated distress scale. Multilevel models separated variation between students from changes within the same student over time. Greater week-to-week variation in commuting time was associated with higher distress scores after accounting for average travel duration, paid work, and household resources. Interviews with 28 participants linked this pattern to missed classes, difficulty arranging group work, and reduced confidence about arrival times. Support from classmates appeared to ease some practical consequences of travel disruption. The observational design and self-reported journeys limit causal interpretation. University support services could consider flexible attendance arrangements and predictable access to recorded materials, while future research tests whether transport reliability improvements reduce distress across a full academic year.

Keywords: commuting uncertainty, student wellbeing, psychological distress, travel diaries, Dhaka

1. Introduction

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2. Methods

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