



# SHEHLA QURESHI

SSP District Central Karachi and AIG Gender Crimes  
Podcast Insights

# Breaking Barriers

## Key insights from the Podcast with AIG Shehla Qureshi

As part of the “Strengthening Women’s Representation in the Pakistani Judiciary” project by Accountability Lab and UN Women, we sat down with AIG Shehla Qureshi—Senior Superintendent of Police (District Central, Karachi) and Assistant Inspector General (Gender Crimes)—to spotlight the life and leadership of a woman who has broken barriers and redefined policing in Pakistan.

### A Journey Rooted in Purpose and Resilience

From a young girl dubbed “Shehla Thanedar” by her grandfather to becoming Karachi’s first female Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), Shehla Qureshi’s journey is a powerful reminder of how deeply personal convictions can intersect with public service. In a family where women traditionally stayed away from professional roles, her entry into the police force was both unprecedented and transformative.

Initially pursuing a career in medicine, Shehla’s life pivoted after the tragic assassination of her uncle, a doctor, which led her to rethink her purpose. “I wanted to save lives differently,” she recalls. Her resolve deepened through her experiences in a conflict-ridden Karachi, where witnessing violence became part of everyday life.

### Breaking Stereotypes in the Police Service

Despite societal skepticism and familial pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, Shehla excelled in the Central Superior Services (CSS) exam and joined the Police Service of Pakistan. At the National Police Academy, she was one of only two women in the PSP cohort of her batch. Since then, her presence in senior police leadership has been both symbolic and strategic.

Her training—and later, field experience—has been rigorous, navigating high-profile criminal investigations, counterfeit currency gangs, and sensitive gender-based violence (GBV) cases. Yet, what sets Shehla apart is not just her operational excellence, but her unwavering belief in the role women must play in policing.

### Why Representation Matters

According to Shehla, female police officers bring unique strengths to the force: emotional intelligence, empathy, and a communication style that encourages victims—especially women and children—to speak up. “In GBV cases, women survivors often cannot share their trauma with male officers,” she explains. “But a woman investigator creates space for comfort and trust.”

Her insights echo her goal to amplify the visibility of women in justice sector institutions and to inspire more young women to join police, judiciary, prosecution, and legal professions. Shehla’s leadership has already had visible impact. She recounts how female participation in the Sindh police force has increased twelvefold, thanks to sustained recruitment drives, community seminars, and legislative reforms.

### Reforming Systems, Not Just Individuals

Shehla emphasizes that policing is not just about enforcement—it is about service. Her focus on systemic reforms is clear:

- She led the operationalization of Sex Offender Registration Rules (2023) in Sindh—the first province to do so.
- Under her guidance, gender desks and women protection units were set up across districts, supported by trained staff and safe reporting mechanisms.
- The 1715 helpline and WPC mobile application were developed to make complaint registration accessible, especially for women in remote areas.

Her efforts have also contributed to improved conviction rates in rape and murder cases, particularly in pilot districts like Karachi East and Central, where specialized sexual offenses units have raised conviction rates from 5% to over 40%.

### **The Daily Reality of Police Work**

Despite these wins, Shehla paints a sobering picture of the daily grind for police personnel. “An investigator handles up to 250 cases at a time—how can you expect deep focus?” she asks. Coupled with 12–14-hour shifts, inadequate resources, and outdated infrastructure, the burden is immense. And yet, she sees the role as a calling, not just a career. “If you see it as a job, you won’t last. But if you see it as worship, as service to the people, you find strength in it.”

### **Community-Centered Policing and Social Trust**

Shehla's work goes far beyond law enforcement. From reuniting missing children with families to mediating disputes over power outages, her team’s responsiveness reflects a new face of policing: one that is humane, accessible, and rooted in social trust.

In cases of early child marriage, for instance, Shehla’s intervention saved underage girls from being forced into harmful unions. New policies now require marriage officiants to verify the ages of both bride and groom via national ID cards—a crucial step in prevention.

### **Inspiration for the Next Generation**

With more than 4000 women now part of Sindh’s police force, and eight out of the top 18 CSS police candidates this year being women, Shehla’s legacy is tangible. She believes that young women need to see role models to believe a career in policing is possible—and desirable. “You wear the uniform, but it’s your nature, your training, and your passion that define how you serve,” she says. “Our mothers, our mentors, our communities all play a role in shaping that.”

### **Conclusion:**

AIG Shehla Qureshi’s story is not just inspiring—it is a blueprint for systemic change. Her career embodies the mission to challenge stereotypes, transform institutions, and inspire a generation of women to lead from the frontlines of justice. In a country where legal systems have long excluded women from leadership, Shehla reminds us that representation is not just symbolic—it’s revolutionary.