

Does crime prevention mean something differently in Mexico?: How Guadalajara's Police Department responds to mental health crises.



Guadalajara, Jalisco Mexico

Guadalajara is the Capital of Jalisco, a centrally located state in the country of Mexico.

Special Studies Project:

Guadalajara Police Department, Office of Crime Prevention, Primary Intervention – Mental Health Unit

Psychological Services as a form of crime prevention

There is a perception that Mexico is dangerous, corrupt, “developing”. And while there are truths to some of these perceptions, there is a lot the U.S can learn from how Guadalajara responds to mental health crises. In Guadalajara the Police link crime reduction to community mental health. The Police’s Crime Prevention Department has created a special unit that responds to mental health emergencies. This program provides an alternative to policing and begs the question – how would the U.S benefit from a program like this?



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Agency:

Unidad Psicológica de Intervención Primaria (UPIP) is a crisis intervention program in that responds to mental health related crisis in Guadalajara. Whenever there is a mental health crisis (mental health includes inter and intra-family violence) a team of 2 psychologists and a social worker respond to the scene to intervene, assess, and do follow-up as necessary. They respond 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It is funded through the Police Department’s Office of Crime Prevention.

This program is a way in which the Police Department centers health and safety as crime-reducing factors, and reframes the conversation of who is best suited to respond to mental health emergencies.

Project Details:

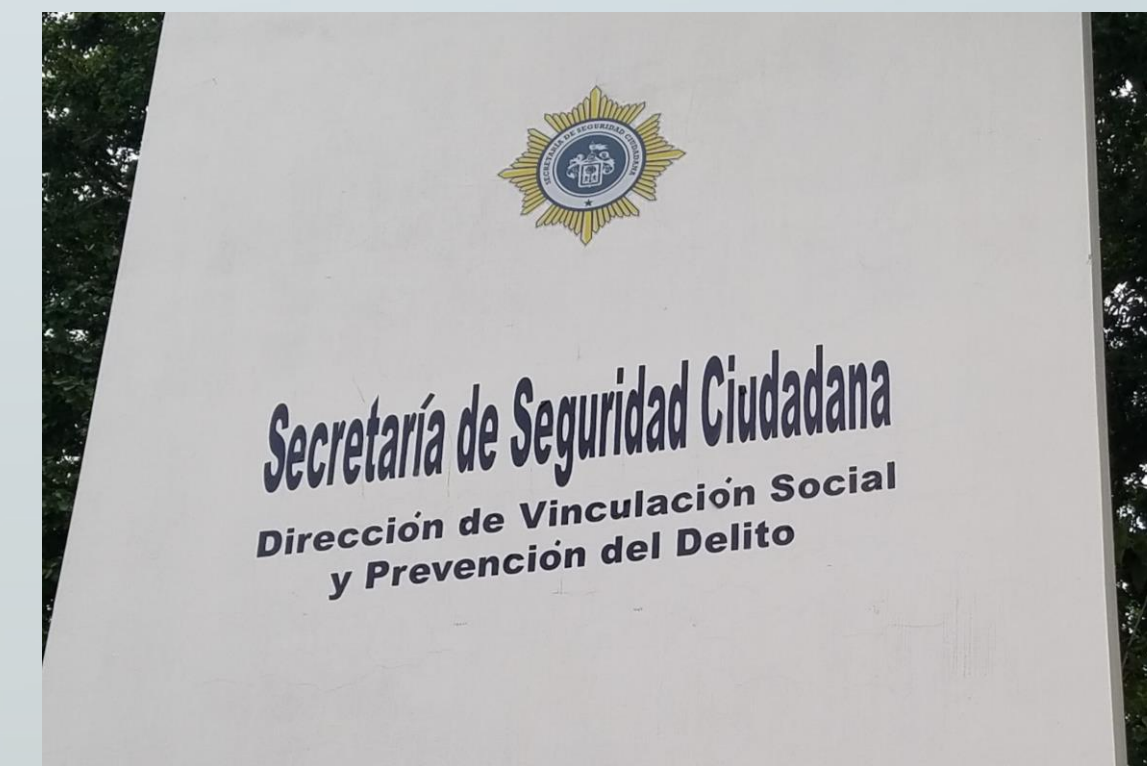
My main objective at UPIP was to learn about how the police interacts with the community. Due to liability issues I was only able to shadow them during domestic violence follow-up visits. However, I spent a great deal of time gathering information about how UPIP functions in Guadalajara, how and why the program started, and how client cases are managed.

Skills Utilized/Developed

- **Cultural Competency/Humility:** I was born in Mexico, but I hadn’t gone back for 17 years. It took a lot of humility to not bring up state-sanctioned violence from the Police Department, especially about Ayotzinapa and Oaxaca.
- **Intersectionality:** In the U.S we do not associate mental health support with the police. Would things be different if we did? We need to think more creatively, and more critically about the connection between mental health and incarceration.

Outcomes:

- Better understanding of the social services available in Guadalajara
- Critical analysis of police protocol when responding to mental health crises in Guadalajara vs the US.



Connections

Classroom:

What best prepared me for this experience was my summer field experience in Oakland, CA. I interned at an organization that works against mass incarceration. Before this summer, I never would have imagined having a relationship with the Mexican Police Department. However through critical reflection and exploration I realized that these opposing experiences gave me an opportunity to form my own definition of criminal justice and to continue challenging the status quo of policing. The U.S is at a pivotal but dangerous moment. Why do 911 calls end up with dead POC? Why do we entangle mental health crisis with a police car and handcuffs? And can we consider a future where a program like Guadalajara's are the norm, instead of a rarity?

Career

My career goal is to do policy work at the intersect of immigration and criminal justice. This experience was the perfect launching pad.



Advice

- Draw on your existing networks, I was able to get connected to the Police Department through my aunt.
- As Mexican national, going back to Mexico after 17 years was overwhelmingly emotional. Find a way to process while you are there and once you return.
- If you are in an agency or a non-profit, befriend the front desk staff. They will help you if things are not going smoothly or you need additional support from elsewhere.

Lessons Learned

- Just because you’re coming from the U.S. it doesn’t mean all doors will open for you. You’ll have to earn people’s trust.
- You don’t have to have it all figured out, your experience and project will change as you get a better grasp of what you’re doing at your site.
- Unintentional lesson – Guadalajara is my birth place, but it will never be my home again. It was a painful realization that I am still processing.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Guadalajara’s Office of Vinculación Social and Prevención de Delito for giving me the opportunity and space to learn from them. To the Alumni Board of Governors for their generous funding, and to Katie Lopez for making traveling abroad as a DACA student not only accessible, but easy.