

## **Marketing Your Mediation Practice: Who Uses Mediation?**

By Sarah Bergdahl and Lars Watson

Do you know of any mediators that have waiting lists of clients? Why do DRC's struggle to find enough cases for their practicums? Media reports confirm that conflict is still in abundance for all segments of the population regardless of race, culture, religion, economic status, sexual orientation or political persuasion. What is the most effective way to market mediation when so many people remain confused as to what it is, some even wondering if meditation might be involved? Through the 2008 strategic planning process it became obvious that these questions loomed front and center for those looking to open or maintain a private practice, for DRC's working toward expansion and development, and even for volunteers wanting to hone their skills through experiencing enough cases in DRC practicums. The WMA Outreach and Education Committee decided to directly address these questions.

Taking advantage of a day of national recognition, Oct. 16, Conflict Resolution Day, and the enthusiasm of the WMA Board, about 25 mediators from around the state of WA donned red ribbons and large "Got Conflict?" buttons, grabbed their questionnaires and their 3 fold WMA flyers (in English and Spanish) and headed for a busy street corner. Their mission was two fold:

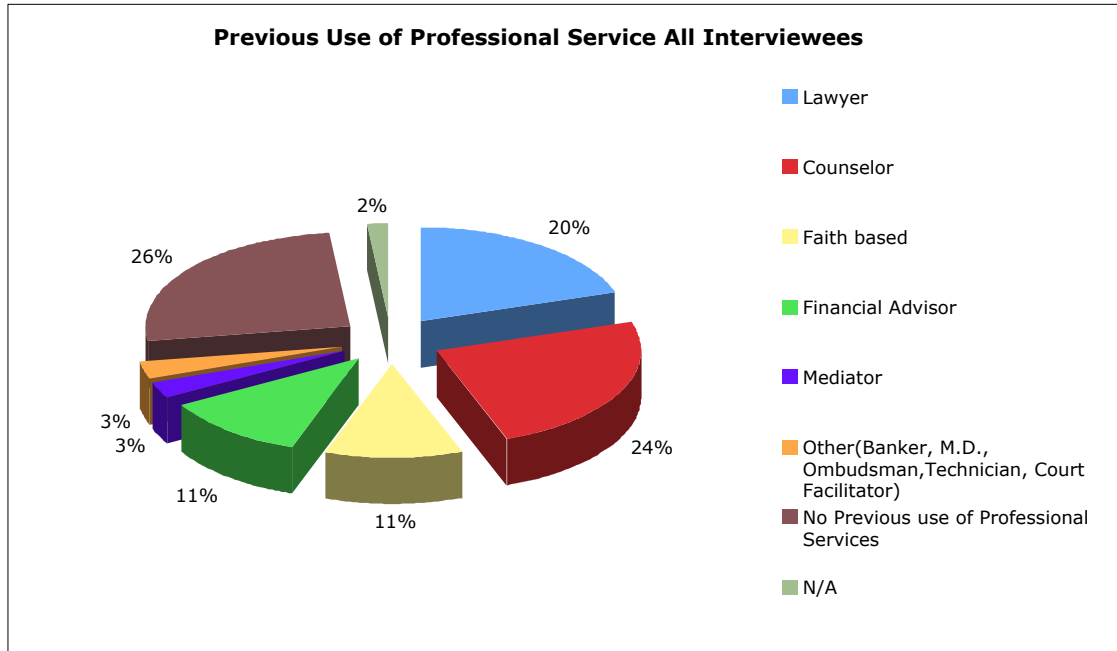
1. Find out what professional support services people use, including how they select them, and,
2. Tell them about the WMA website so that they can find list of certified mediators to meet their needs.

### **DATA SUMMARY**

A total of 328 interviews were conducted: 100 (30%) men and 228 (70%) women. By cultural background 67% were Euro-American, 12% African American, 11% Asian/Asian Pacific Islander, and 4% Hispanic. A little less than half of the interviewees came from Seattle including West Seattle (49%), with Suburban Seattle accounting for 30% of the Sample and Other areas in Northwestern Washington accounting for 12%. Eastern Washington and the University of Washington accounted for 5% and 4% of the sample respectively.

The pool of interviewees, numbering about 25, came from WMA members in private practice, as well as mediators from the Bellevue Mediation Program, Dispute Resolution Center of King County, Interlocal Conflict Resolution Group, Seattle ADR program, Snohomish County DRC, University of Washington Law School Mediation Clinic, Whatcom County DRC, and Yakima Valley DRC.

Question 1. Have you ever used a professional to help you solve a problem or help you understand something more clearly? We wanted to determine whether the interviewees had previously used professional services and, for those who had, what were their sources of referrals for these services. Displayed below are the data for the previous use of professional services by interviewees.



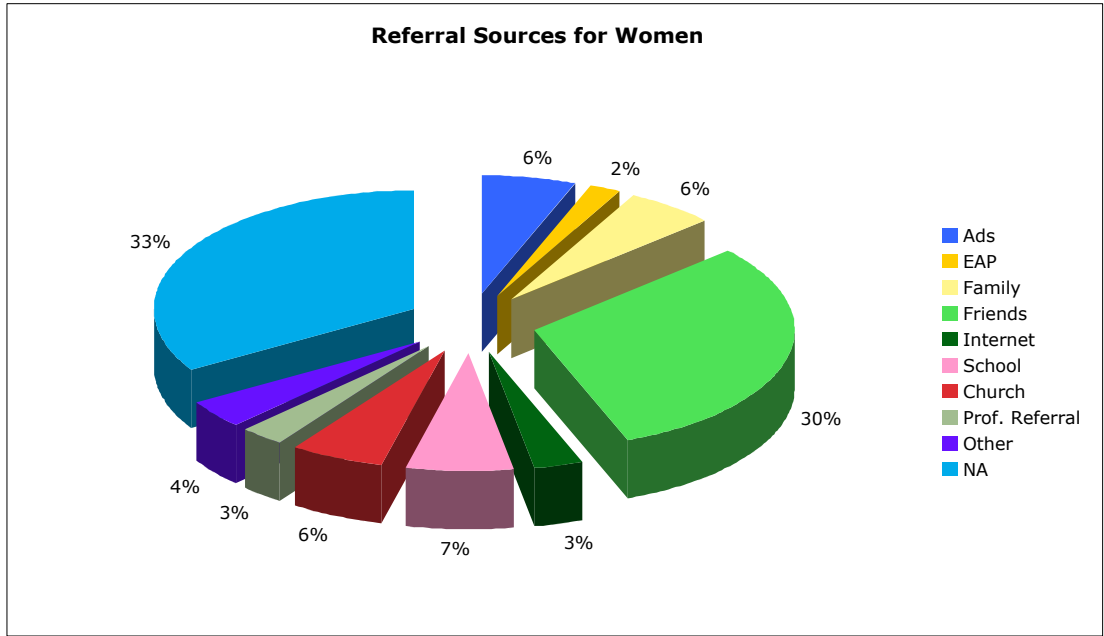
Almost three quarters of the sample had previously used professional services. There were only slight gender differences: women were slightly more likely to use the services of a lawyer or counselor while men were slightly more likely to use a financial advisor. Together lawyers and counselors accounted for about 44% of the professional services previously used. Mediators account for only about 3% of professional services that had been used by interviewees..

Question #2. How did you hear about the person who helped you? To best target future marketing efforts, we collected and analyzed the sources of referral information by interviewees. We tallied NA if there was no answer, or if they never used a professional (No to question #1). Some of the interviewers modified the questions to meet the needs of their own mediation programs thus skewing the data somewhat.. This resulted NA's (No Answer or Not Applicable, which contributed to NA being the largest percentage on the charts below.

The most notable finding in the results from question regarding referral sources (see chart below) is that friends accounted for 25% of the referral sources, more than three times that of the next most prevalent source (referrals from another professional (8% ).

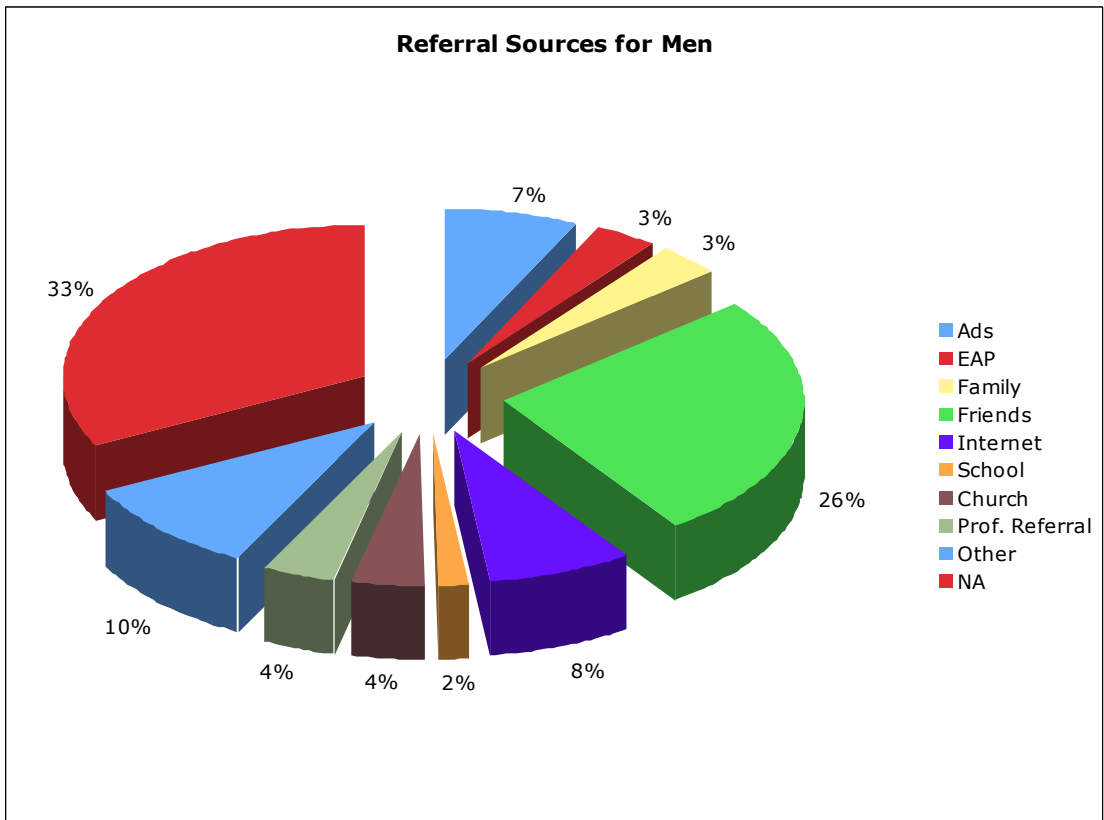
The sources of referrals were also broken down by gender and the results are displayed below.

For women, using friends for referrals was even more prevalent as for the group as a whole. At 30%, the answer of friends as referrals was more than four times greater than any of the next three categories: school (7%), family (6%), and Ads (6%).



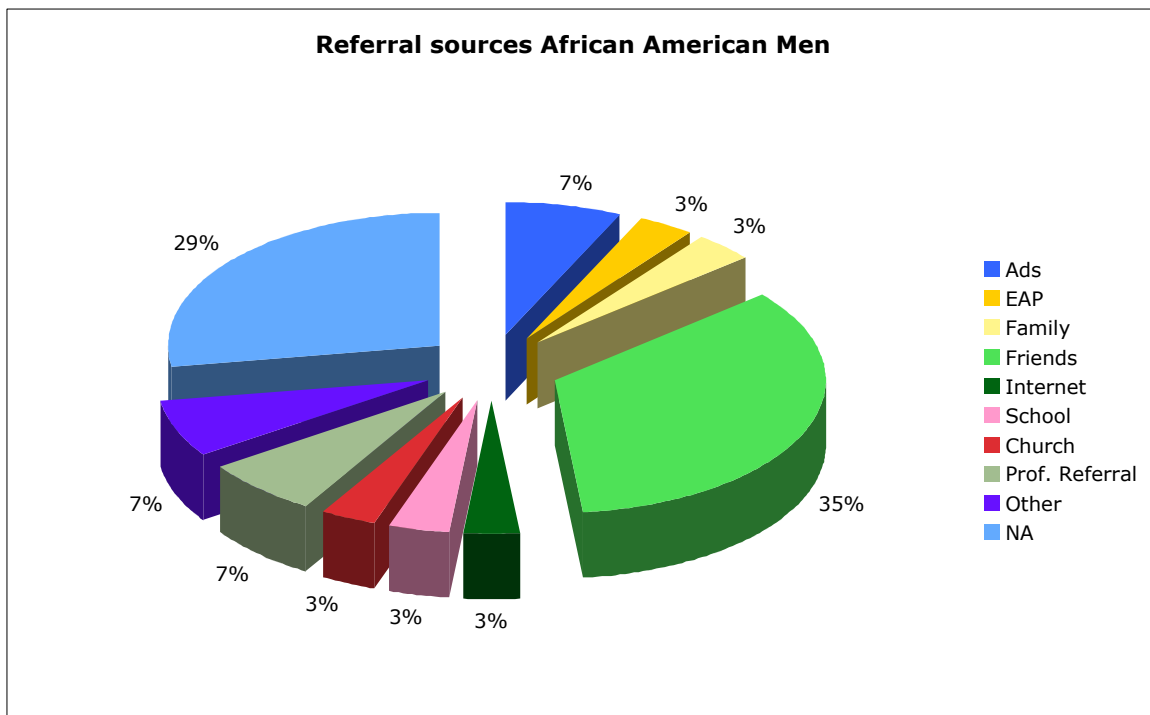
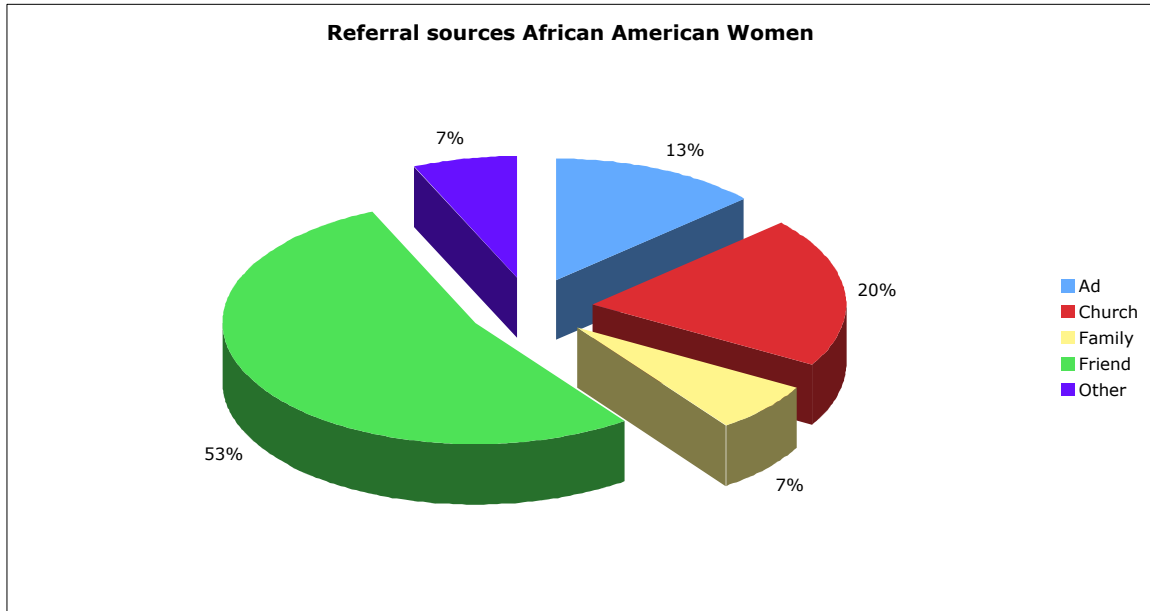
For men the use of friends as a referral source was also more than three times the next most prevalent referral source categories. However, it is interesting to note that the next most frequent categories for men differed from those for women: Internet (8%), and Ads(7%).

### Men (general)

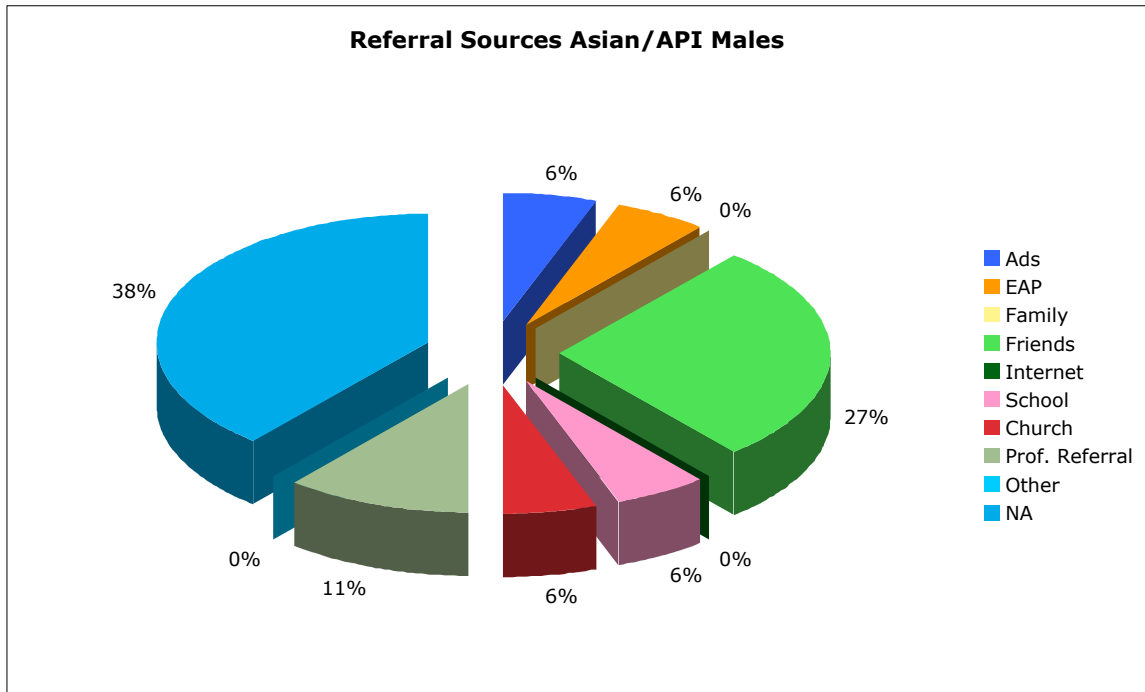
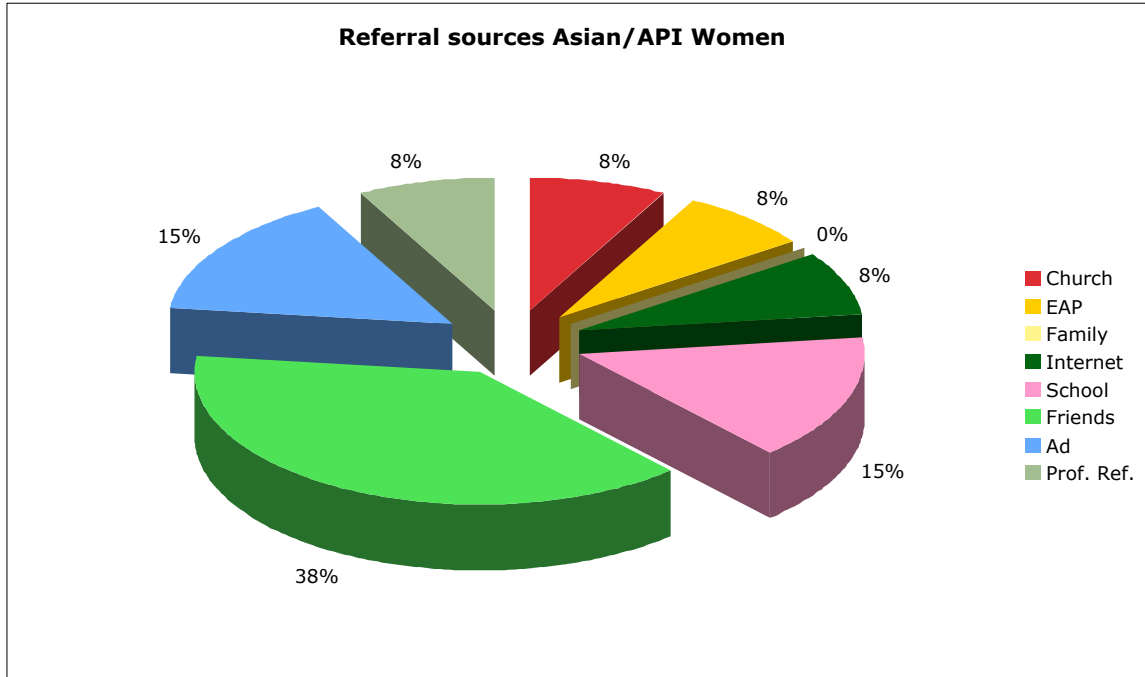


The referral sources by gender and cultural background were also examined. Displayed below are charts that visually present this information.

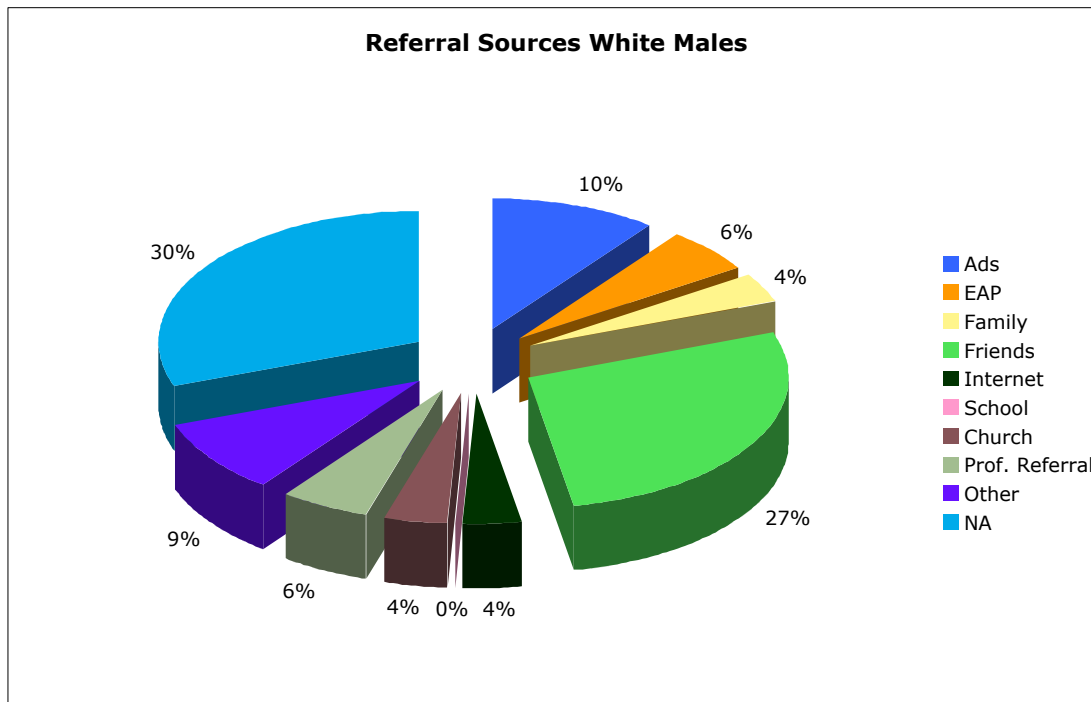
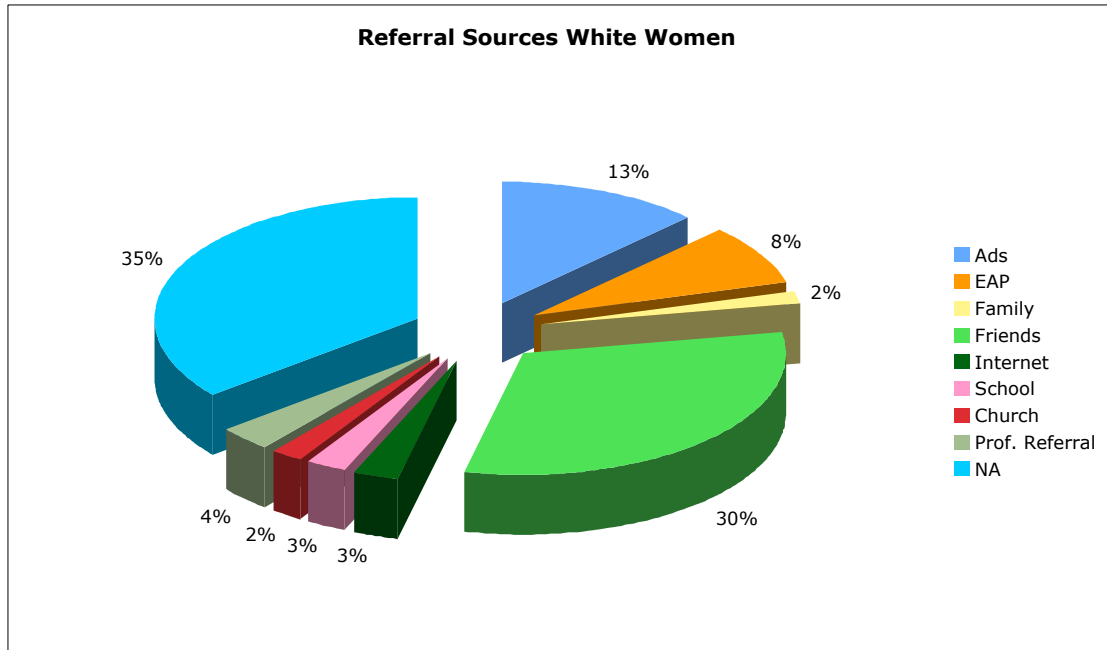
## African Americans



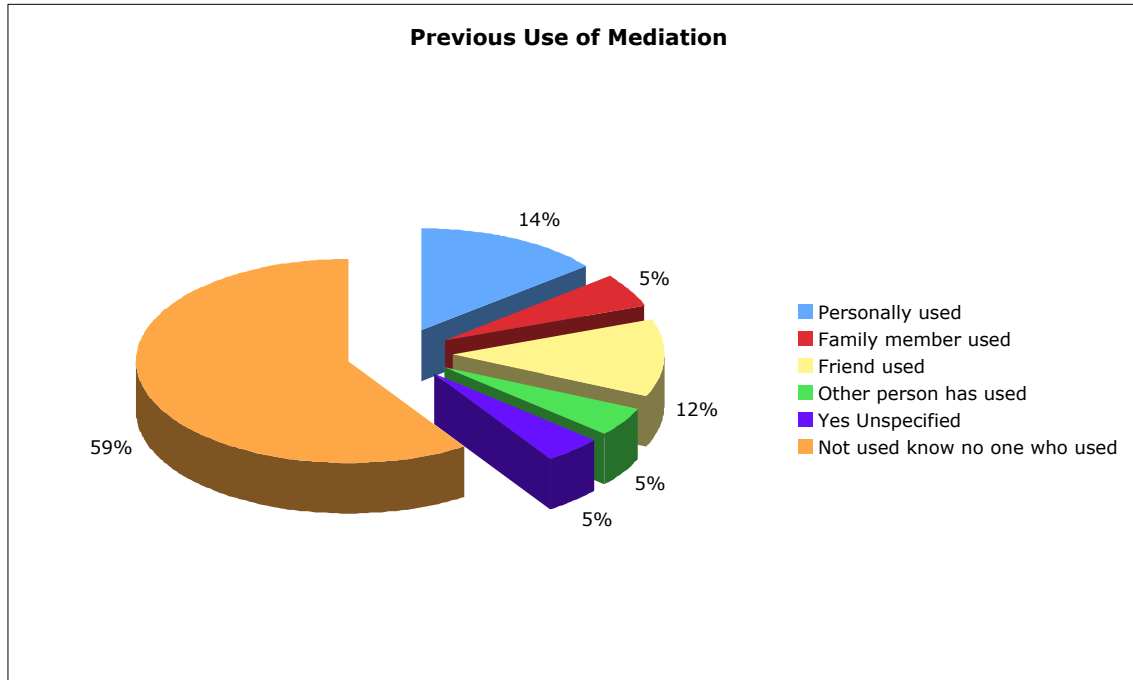
# Asian/Asian Pacific Islanders



# Whites



Question 3: Have you ever used a mediator or do you know of anyone who has? This data is displayed below. It shows the extent to which our sample has had contact with mediation, either personally or through friends, family or acquaintances.



Question 4: What would make it easy for you to consider using a mediator next time you need to make a big decision with another person or a group or need to solve a problem?

214 people answered this question. Our findings indicate that they desire more information and that this could be delivered on the internet, ads or by face to face community outreach. The needed information cited by the interviewees included:

- ✓ How to find a well-trained mediator,
- ✓ Cost effectiveness,
- ✓ Where to find information about the process,
- ✓ Location of mediations,
- ✓ That mediation was an option for them to consider,
- ✓ The range of applications of the process.

We highlight here a few of the standout ideas for marketing offered by interviewees:

- ✓ Insert information on mediation into Welcome packets in colleges and universities
- ✓ Train university Resident Assistants in mediation
- ✓ Put posters in Break Rooms
- ✓ Get invited to KUOW's The Conversation
- ✓ Put an article in Health Tips newsletters
- ✓ Advertise success rates!

As part of the interview process we asked for feedback from the interviewees as to what was effective and worked, what challenges they experienced in conducting the interviews and what changes they would suggest. Several interviewees remarked that they thought that one-on-one marketing was effective, though there were also some who felt that it

was inefficient not to target those individuals who were likely to need or use mediation. There were also comments that having a questionnaire and a brochure gave them a structure that made it easier to connect with the persons with whom they were having a conversation.

One frequent feedback response on the subject of challenges was that conducting the interviews was difficult if not painful for mediators as they were way out of their comfort zone in conducting interviews. What helped some was the structure of the interview as well as the brochure. Others remarked that it was difficult to get people to stop. It appears that the persons who had the most success in this regard interviewed people who were waiting for buses.

There were a number of changes suggested. These included doing focused presentations to HR Counselors and Psychologists and targeting gatekeepers, or groups. Some suggested that doing the interviews in pairs could make them easier and others suggested that the questions could have been clarified or revised. In this regard, our analysis was limited both by the structure of the questions and the ways that the responses were filled out. The interviews, in some instances, did double duty to meet the needs of other mediation programs and this resulted in some inconsistencies. The authors would hope that in the future this could be addressed to increase the value of the information obtained. A number of individuals suggested that the materials be sent out all together to avoid confusion, that there be more training, and that there be more lead time to get these things done before the date of the interviews.

### **Next steps**

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What are our next steps? The WMA Outreach Committee is continuing discussions on implementing some of the above mentioned suggestions from the interviewees. The success of these ventures is up to you. Get involved!

### **QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN**

There were three key concepts considered in formulating the questionnaire:

1. The interviewer would have only 3 -5 minutes and need to divide this between collecting data (listening to the participant) and distributing information about mediation and the WMA,
2. Demographic information might be as useful as substantive topic knowledge, and
3. Discussion of the relationship between people's past experience and understanding where people learn about professional services would quickly put the participant in the position of being the expert and would link us to the most effective path for future marketing efforts with specific demographic groups.

While it was our hope to interview a diverse contingent of participants, we abandoned the idea of having any control over the location that interviews would take place. For our first face to face marketing effort of this size and nature, we conceptually borrowed Nike's slogan, "Just Do It" and offered people freedom of choice of location and time of day.

After a brief introduction pointing out that the day was National Conflict Resolution Day and introducing the WMA, interviewers asked 5 questions: 1) Have you ever used a professional to help you solve a problem or understand something more clearly? 2) How did you hear about the person who helped you? 3) Have you ever used a mediator or do you know anyone who has? 4) What would make it easy for you to consider using a mediator next time you need to make a decision with another person or group or need to solve a problem?

In between questions mediators informed interviewee about who mediators are, what they do and how they can be used. To promote conciseness they used a script and visually showed the information on the 3 fold brochure that they then left with the interviewee.

Demographic questions included gender, age, racial/cultural self identification, and city of residence.