



**Washington State Auditor's Office**

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**Troy Kelley**

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**Using Surveys in Performance Audits:  
Perspectives of Washington Families who  
Adopted Children from Foster Care**

Pacific Northwest Intergovernmental Audit Forum

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# Is a survey a good way to get the information?

- Is the information available by other means?
- Will self-reported information be credible?
- Do you want the results to represent a larger group than the people you survey?
- Will simple questions and responses get you the information you need?
- Can your respondents be reached by mail, the internet, or telephone?



# Why we chose to survey adoptive parents

- We wanted to gauge the level of need for services
- Information on parents experiences and perspectives only available through a survey
- We wanted to be able to generalize results to all 9,000 adoptive families in the state
- Mail survey

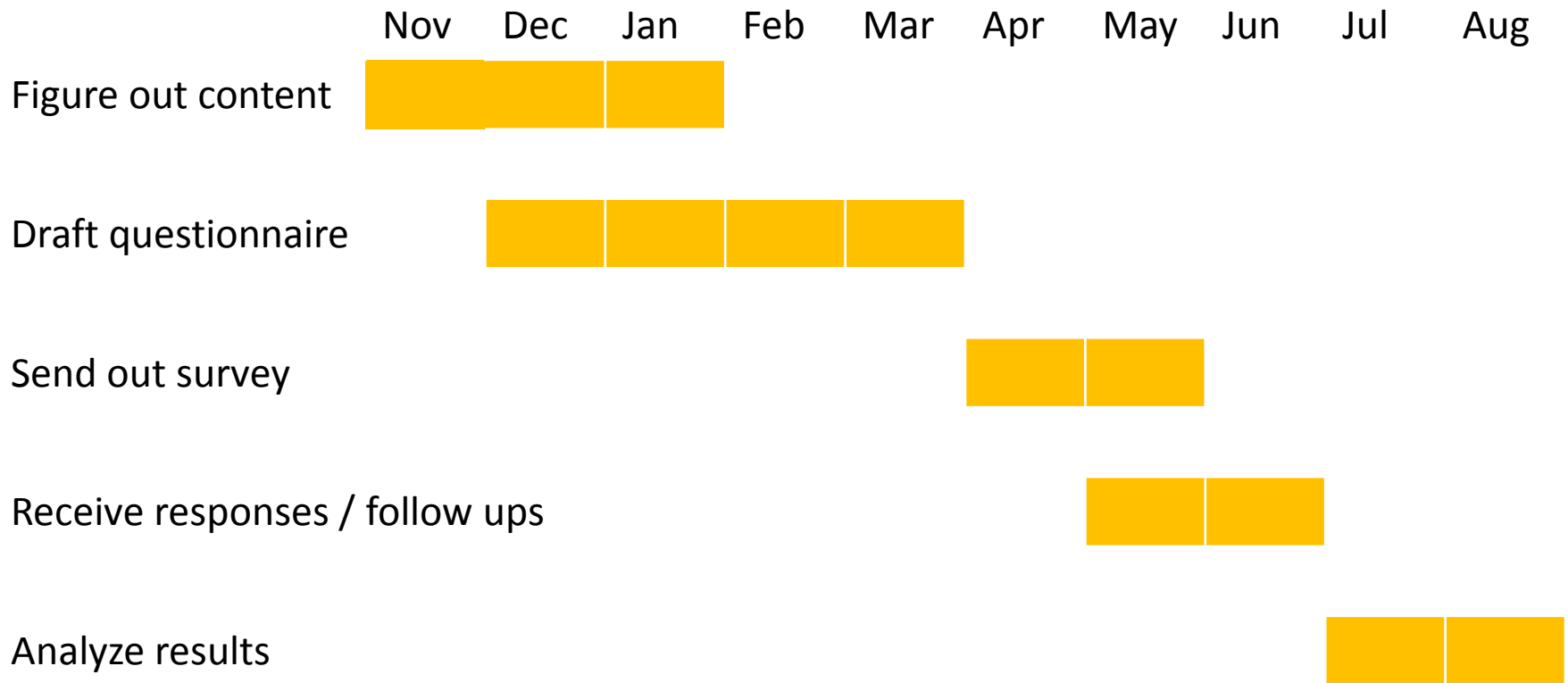


# Surveys done well are time consuming

## To-Do List

- Decide what you want to know
- Get contact information for potential respondents
- Write/revise/revise/revise questions
- Work on survey layout
- Pre-test the survey
- Send out advance notice of the survey
- Send out survey
- Follow up with those who do not respond
- Data entry, coding, analysis

# Adoptive parent survey was time consuming



# Tips on writing questions: Getting the information you want

# Examples of questions from the adoption survey

- Does the question apply to the respondent?
- Use specific, concrete words to describe the concept

*Q30. During the past year, has this child (the one with the most recent birthday) needed individual counseling?*

**Yes – Continue to Q31**

**No – Continue to Q36**

# Examples of questions from the adoption survey

- Ask one question at a time (Double barreled question)

*During the past year did your child need individual counseling and were you able to access individual counseling for this child?*

**Yes**

**No**



# Examples of questions from the adoption survey

- Use simple words
- Use complete sentences with simple sentence structures
- Use as few words as possible

*During the past year were you able to access individual counseling for this child?*

*OR*

*During the past year did this child get individual counseling?*

# Writing questions is the most important task

- Make sure the question applies to the respondent
- Use specific, concrete words to describe the concept
- Ask one question at a time
- Use simple and familiar words
- Use as few words as possible
- Use complete sentences with simple sentence structures

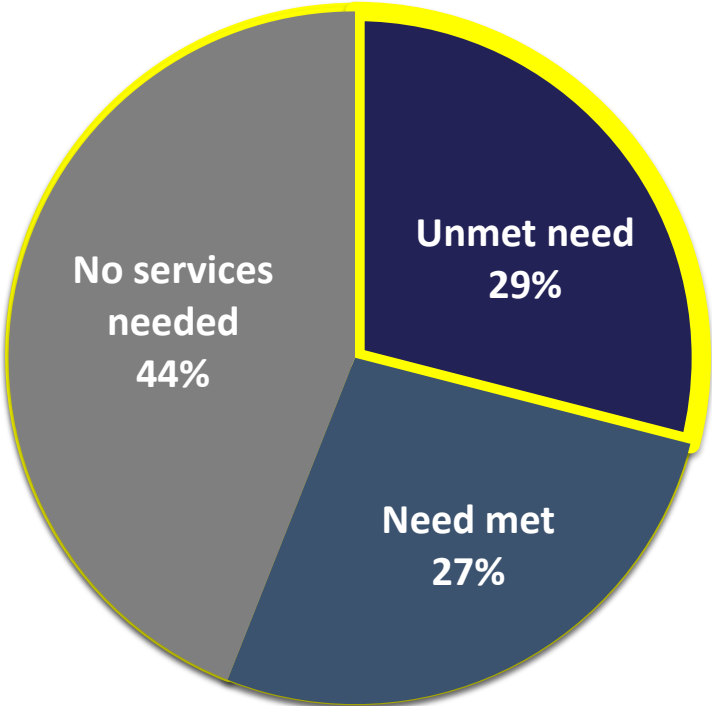
(from *Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys*, Dillman, et. al. 2009)

# Analyzing results

- It's advantageous to use a statistical software package (e.g., SAS, STATA, SPSS)
- How we defined whether service needs were met
- How we defined families with the greatest need: a diagnosed disability that severely impacts children's' lives

# What we found

**Most families needs are met, but some can't access needed services**

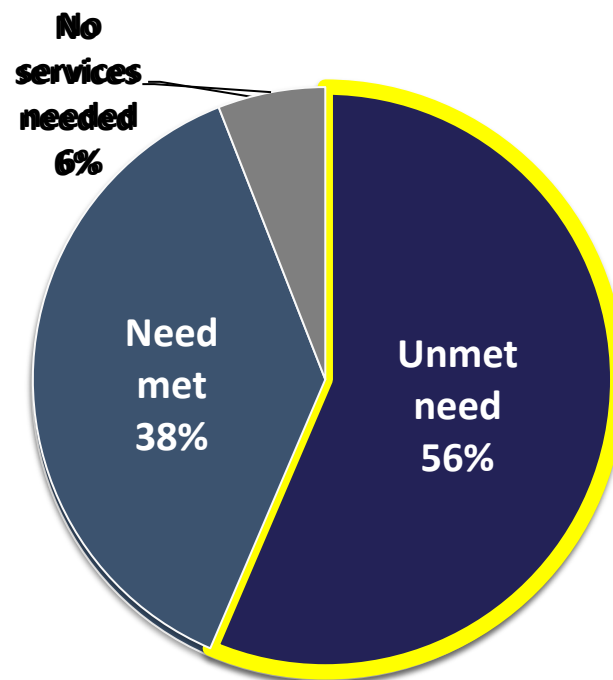


# What we found

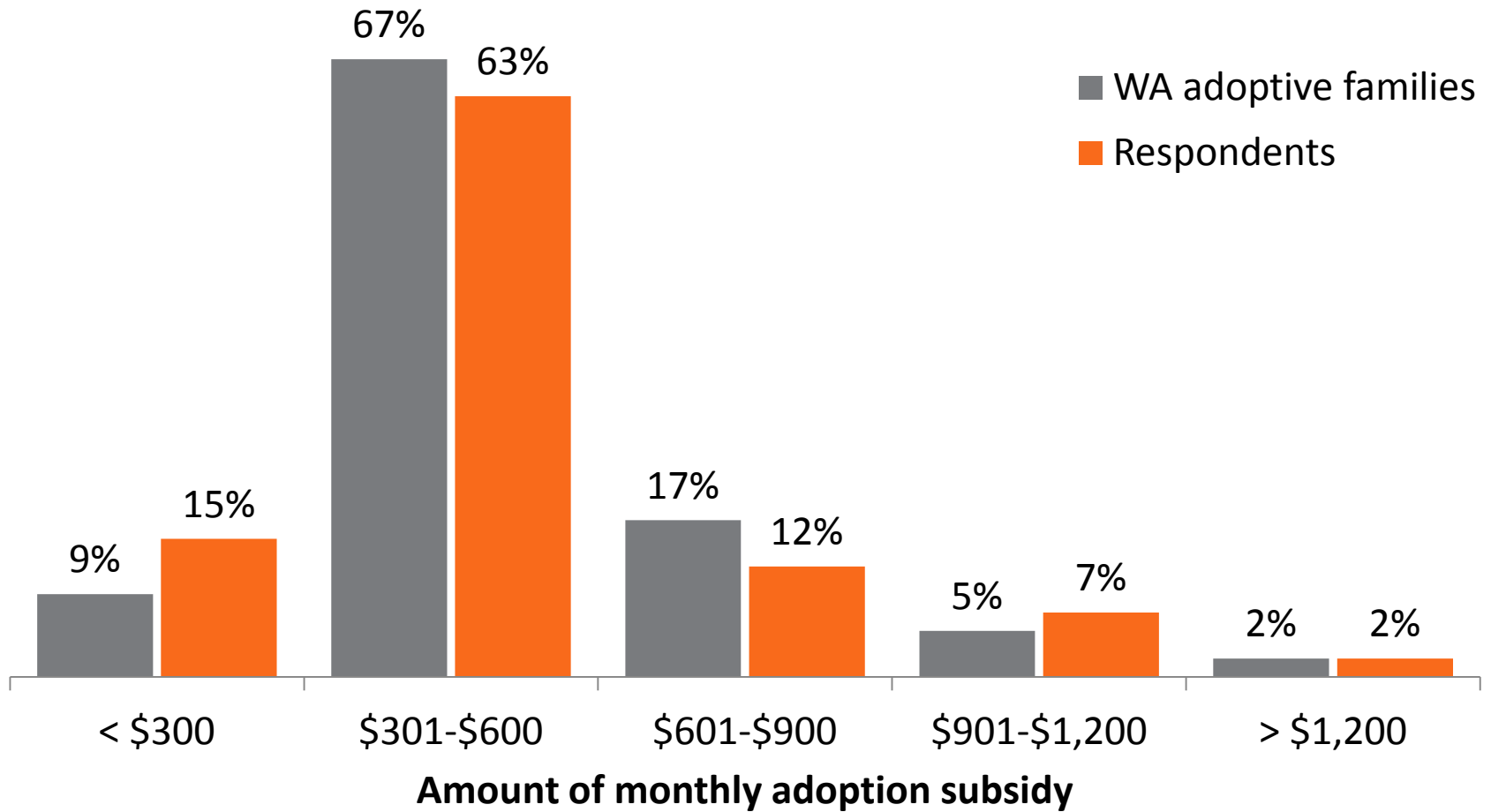
## Biggest service gaps: children with the greatest need

- 16% of parents are raising children with a diagnosed disability that severely impacts their lives
- Families typically needed three services compared to one service needed by other children in the survey

*Results represent 16% of families*



# Checking for potential non-response bias is key



# Contacts

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Resource on Survey Research

*Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys*, Dillman, et. al., 2009

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