

Occupational Health and Safety Professionals and Ethical Challenges: A Scoping Review

Author: Dr. Mohamed Shoukri, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Thomas Tenkate, School of Occupational and Public Health, Ryerson University

Purpose

The primary objective of this scoping review is to explore the existing literature for different reasons behind the ethical breach in occupational health and safety.

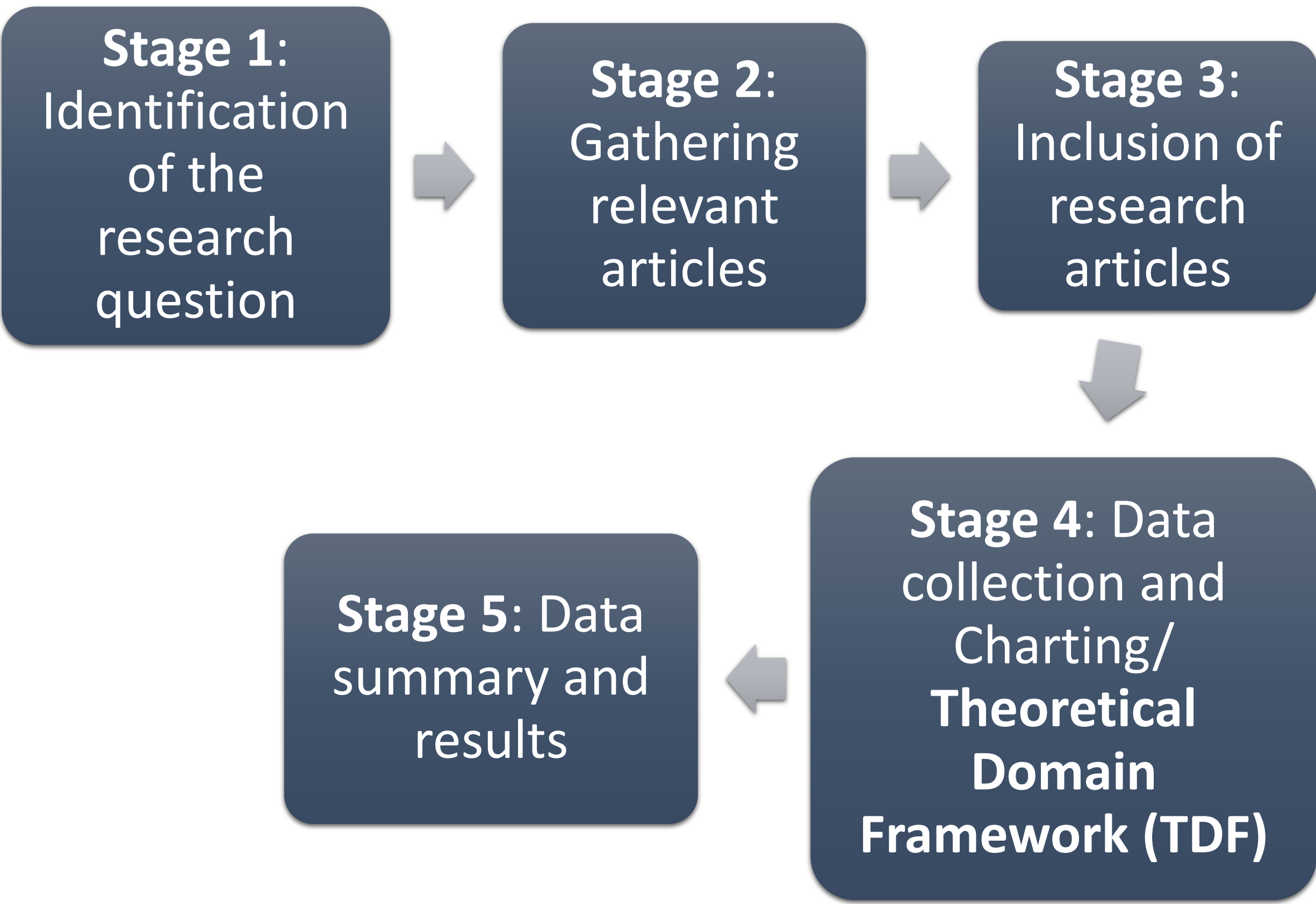
Another objective is to analyze the collected data in more depth and the identification of the individuals or parties associated with different reasons for the ethical breach.

Methods

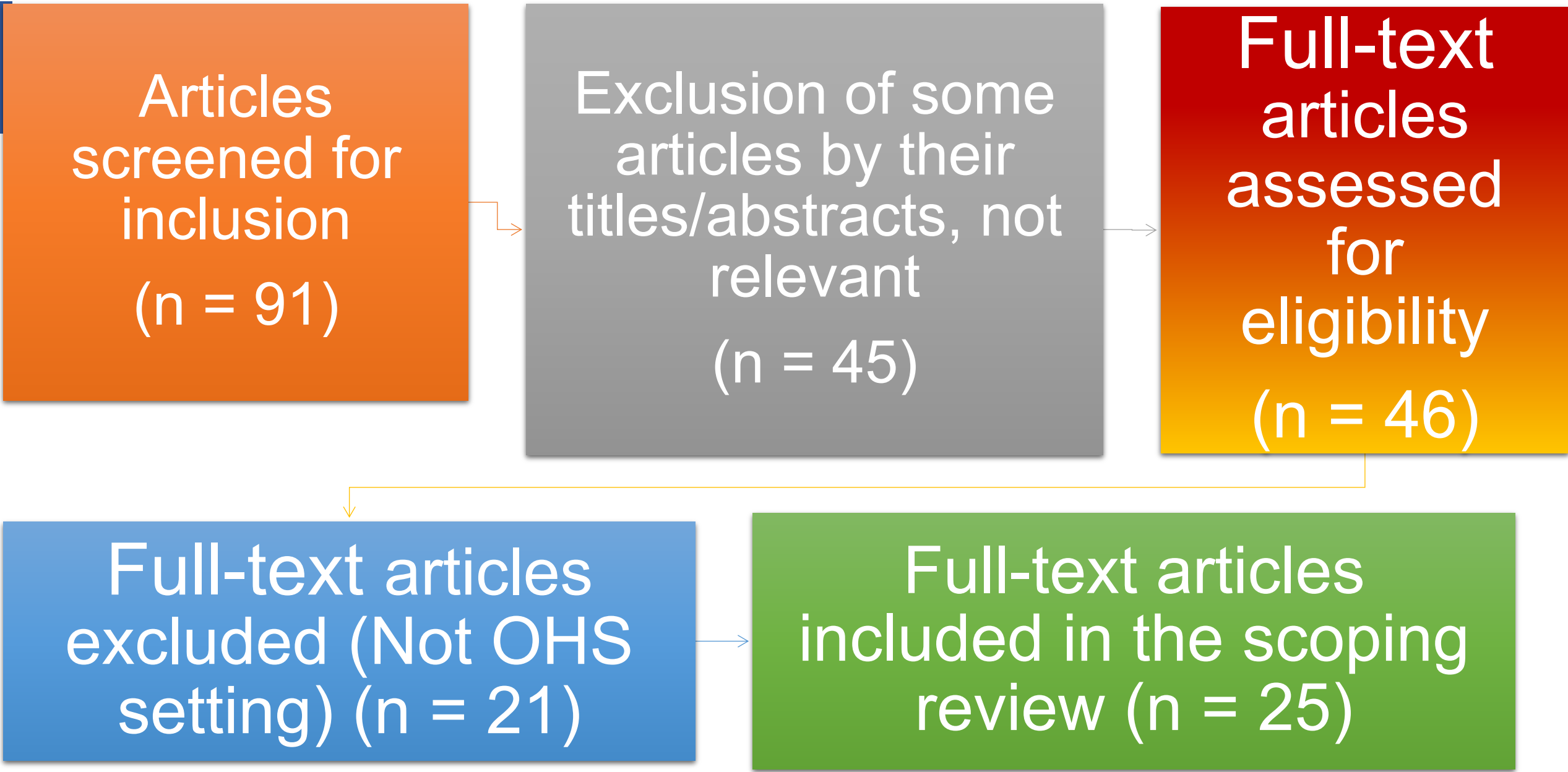
This scoping review was established by using the structure of the scoping review methodology of Hilary Arksey and Lisa O’Malleyto published in 2005, following their five stages of the scoping review framework^{1,4}.

The research question is: What is known from the existing literature about the reasons for the ethical breach in occupational health and safety and who are the involved parties?

After the inclusion of relevant articles, n = 25, data were analyzed in two levels, first by conventional content analysis followed by data charting under the guidance of selected domains or themes representing the main reasons behind the ethical breach. This process called Theoretical Domain Framework TDF¹.



Flowchart 1: Stages of the scoping review framework¹



Flowchart 2: Second and third stages of scoping review

Results

Characteristic		
Publication Year (n = 25)		
1996	1 (4)	
1997	5 (20)	
1998	4 (16)	
2000	2 (8)	
2002	1 (4)	
2006	1 (4)	
2007	3 (12)	
2009	1 (4)	
2013	1 (4)	
2014	2 (8)	
2016	2 (8)	
2017	1 (4)	
2018	1 (4)	
Publication Type (n = 25)		
Review	23 (92)	
Experimental studies	Qualitative 0	Quantitative 2 (8)
Publication Source (n = 25)		
Journal of Occupational Medicine	6 (24)	
South African Medical Journal	1 (4)	
International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health	2 (8)	
American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA)	1 (4)	
Indian Journal of Medical Ethics	1 (4)	
Occupational and Environmental Health Research Unit, University of Cape Town	2 (8)	
Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford, UK	1 (4)	
The Polish Journal of Management Studies	1 (4)	
Corner – i	1 (4)	
Environmental Health Perspectives	2 (8)	
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	1 (4)	
NEBOSH: National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (UK)	1 (4)	
Occupational Health Southern Africa	3 (12)	
Medicine del Lavoro (Switzerland)	1 (4)	
Industrial Health (Sweden)	1 (4)	
Geographical Area of Research		
Netherlands, UK, and Singapore	1 (4)	
South Africa	5 (20)	
WHO: Europe office	1 (4)	
Georgia	1 (4)	
UK	8 (32)	
India	1 (4)	
Romania	1 (4)	
USA	1 (4)	
Canada	1 (4)	
USA and Canada	1 (4)	
Italy and Finland	1 (4)	
Sweden	2 (8)	
Belgium	1 (4)	

Table 1: Characteristics of the 25 articles included in the Scoping Review on Ethical Challenges for OHS Professionals

Professional party or body	Reasons for Ethical Breach	Times Coded	Total Times Coded	The reason for Ethical Breach	Total times coded
OHS Professionals	Incompetent system or personnel	3	20	A gap in the ethical code	5
	Breach of confidentiality	3		A gap between ethical codes and laws	3
	Breach of privacy	1		Lack of training in Ethics	2
	The right to know and Fidelity	6		Incompetent system or personnel	4
	Discredit another employee	1		Breach of confidentiality	11
	Data collection	1		Economic Pressure	9
	Data recording and keeping	3		Breach of Privacy	1
	Use of inappropriate language	1		The right to know and Fidelity	9
	Inflated experience	1		Discredit another employee	1
		0		Data collection	1
		0		Data recording and keeping	3
		0		Use of inappropriate language	1
Another employee/s Third Parties	Lack of training in Ethics	1	6	Inflated experience	1
	Incompetent system or personnel	1		Injustice / Discrimination	2
	Economic Pressure	3			
	Data recording and keeping	1			
		0			
Management	Lack of training in Ethics	1	20		
	Breach of confidentiality	8			
	Economic Pressure	6			
	The right to know and Fidelity	3			
	Injustice / Discrimination	2			
Clients Legislative or ethical bodies		0	8		
	A gap in the ethical code	5			
	A gap between ethical codes and laws	3			

Table 2: Times coded of professional parties or bodies involved in the reasons of the ethical breach in the 25 articles

Discussion

In 2014, Robert Stuthridge recognized that the most common reason associated with the ethical breach in occupational health and safety was the economic pressure². However, this scoping review found that the most frequent reason is the breach of confidentiality. The discrepancy regarding this finding should warrant further research. It is crucial to have a peer-review by other experts in the field of ethics to validate the results³. Some areas concerning ethical dilemmas in OHS are covered well in the literature; nevertheless, other areas are remarkably under-researched, for instance, privacy concerns in OHS or training in ethics. Likewise, the involvement of some parties in the ethical breach, like clients or other employees, is still a considerable gap in the research.

Limitations

1. Relatively small number of included studies.
2. The probability of non-inclusion of relevant studies because they are unpublished or difficult to interpret, for instance, published in other languages.
3. Most of the included articles were review studies (92%) versus experimental (8%).
4. Hard to appraise the quality of these studies.

Conclusion

Our study identified 14 themes or domains which represent the main areas or reasons that cause ethical breach among OHSPs. The main reason for the ethical breach in our research is the breach of confidentiality, being coded 11 times in total. The most common involved parties in the ethical breach are the OHSPs and the management, both were coded 20 times in the literature. A gap in research is identified around some reasons, as a breach of privacy or different parties like clients or other employees.

References

1. Hilary Arksey and Lisa O’Malley, 2005. Scoping Studies: Towards a Methodological Framework. International Journal of Social Research Methodology. Vol. 8, No.1, February 2005, pp.19-32.
2. Robert Stuthridge, 2014. Ethics guidance for occupational health professionals. Corner – i, June 10, 2014.
3. Oliver S., 2001. Marking research more useful: integrating different perspectives and different methods. In S. Oliver and G. Peersman (eds) Using Research for Effective Health Promotion (Buckingham: Open University Press), pp. 167-179.
4. Dahn Jeong, Justin Presseau, Rima ElChamaa, Danielle N. Naumann, Colin Mascaro, Francesca Luconi, Karen M. Smith, and Simon Kitto, 2018. Barriers and Facilitators to Self-Directed Learning in Continuing Professional Development for Physicians in Canada: A Scoping Review. Acad Med. 2018; 93: 1245–1254.