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Suicide in parachuting: a case report and review of the literature

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Highlights

- A case of suicide of a parachutist is reported.
- This is the first parachuting-related suicide ever described in the literature.
- Suicides may be greatly underreported in the skydiving community.
- Every skydiving fatality should require a thorough forensic investigation.
- Suicides should be considered in safety surveys on parachuting fatalities.

Abstract

Skydiving fatalities are mostly accidental and the result of human errors. However, suicides may be greatly underreported in skydivers. We present the case of a young civilian skydiver who committed suicide by jumping from an altitude of 4000 meters without activating his chutes. Witnesses reported that the victim had remained in a freefall position until ground impact. Besides an extensive blunt trauma, the autopsy showed an antero-posterior flattening of the body with symmetrical abrasions on its front, which were consistent with a high-energy impact on the ground in a “belly-down” position. Police investigation revealed that the victim had expressed suicidal thoughts in text messages before jumping from the airplane, and examination of his equipment showed that he had disabled the security system allowing the reserve chute to be automatically deployed at low altitude. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first case of suicide of a skydiver that has been described in the scientific literature. A suicidal intent should be assumed in skydiving fatalities involving jumpers with operable but un-activated parachutes on their back. This case highlights the importance of a thorough forensic investigation in such circumstances to ascertain the manner of death.

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