

MENOPAUSE

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Awareness



Breaking the silence ... Women across Fiji are beginning to speak out about their experiences with menopause - a natural life stage too often shrouded in stigma and silence. Picture: LITIA RITOVA

Breaking the silence

Lack of awareness means it goes largely misunderstood

By **SAMANTHA RINA**

THE rage is real. So too the fevers or hot flushes, forgetfulness, facial sweating, skin-crawling sensations, mood swings and the abnormally rapid heartbeat.

While women in the 40 — 55 age group facing these symptoms are likely going through perimenopause or menopause, the lack of awareness

around this significant life change has meant that it goes largely misunderstood, ignored, and untreated.

In Fiji, menopause is rarely a topic of discussion - not on the home front, places of work, and least of all, in our places of worship.

Its equivalent in men - male menopause or andropause - is even far less known.

Global studies reveal that nearly 1 in 10 women have left the workforce due

to unmanaged symptoms, while rising numbers cite menopause as a contributing factor in relationship breakdowns and divorce.

In this special *The Fiji Times* liftout, we centre the conversation on women who are breaking the silence around menopause - sharing their experiences of early onset, hot flushes, memory loss, weight struggles, night sweats, and even stroke risk.

Steeped in stigma, majority of those

interviewed chose to share their stories anonymously, with many saying they were unprepared - handed no guidance from mothers, aunties, or health workers. Others spoke of being misdiagnosed, and even deemed "possessed" and in need of spiritual or religious healing.

Through raw personal accounts and expert insights, this special edition sheds light on menopause, and the need to talk about it - openly and boldly.