First raped at the age of 12, Sarah Wilson endured almost unbelievable abuse for four years in Rotherham, and her sister was murdered. Despite continued threats she insists she is going to make sure her abusers are brought to justice.

‘THEY DON’T SCARE ME NOW’
Lying half-naked on a filthy mattress and out of her head on cheap vodka and cocaine, Sarah Wilson was just 13 when she was repeatedly raped by scores of faceless men, some in their fifties, who queued up to have sex with her. She describes the feeling of suffocation as they groped her childish body.

Such squalid abuse happened every week for years. Groomed by a group of older men, bribed with drugs and alcohol that she came to crave, Wilson was first raped aged 12 by a taxi driver more than 20 years older than her. The rapes went on until she was 16, considered too old for the paedophiles who trafficked and sold her.

During the years she was abused, the authorities ignored her. When she arrived back at the children’s home supposed to protect her, filthy, wired from drugs and reeking of alcohol after a night of being raped, staff paid for the taxis laid on by her abusers.

When her mother begged police to investigate some of the 177 older Asian men whose numbers were stored in her 12-year-old daughter’s phone, officers told her it would infringe data protection laws.

The list of missed opportunities goes on.

“When I was 14 I called up the police to report a rape. They asked when it happened. I said two months ago, but told them I got raped on a regular basis,” Wilson explains. “They said there’s not much we can do about it. That was the end of the conversation. They didn’t come out to see me. That was it.”

The details of Wilson’s horrific story contrast with the bright neatness of her living room and the happy pictures of her family. She tells her story in a flat, angry voice.

“The authorities did not want to know. They blamed us. I have to put the scandal down to them. They could have stopped it 16 years ago and they chose not to.”

An estimated 1,400 girls have been raped, trafficked and abused by mostly Pakistani heritage men in paedophile rings in Rotherham since the 1990s.

The shocking August 2014 independent report into the scandal, written by social work professor Alexis Jay, said the Rotherham authorities were more worried about appearing to be racist than they were about helping vulnerable girls.

Wilson, now 23, has waived her anonymity to write a book, *Violated*. It bleakly describes growing up in a town where thriving traditional industries were replaced by a sense of foreboding, a childhood spent in fear of her abusive father, and a loving mother run ragged by the demands of providing for four children.

Bullied at school and desperate for acceptance, she began to hang around with an older girl, Nadine, who introduced her to a group of men in their thirties.

At first they would just chill together, getting high and drunk in Rotherham’s parks. But soon, the men began expecting favours in return for their gifts of cannabis and vodka.

One of the gang persuaded an 11-year-old Wilson to give him oral sex. A year later, she lost her virginity. Very quickly, men at parties were raping her while others watched and laughed, her childish body used as a piece of meat.

“They got me into drugs and alcohol, which is part of brainwashing. They bought me the stuff, and expected something in return. That’s how it worked. I was oblivious to it all. As long as they’ve got power over you they believe they are untouchable.”

How was it so easy for them to groom you? “Because of my vulnerability,” Wilson quickly replies. “I wanted to belong somewhere. And with these older people I belonged. I didn’t see that my mum was a great mum because they brainwashed me against her.

“My mum grabbed one of them by the throat, and said: ‘She’s 12 years old, what the fuck are you doing with her?’ And they just stood there and laughed. And still walked off with me.”

Wilson stopped attending school, spending days on end in dingy dosshouses and flats above takeaways used for underage sex. She moved between her groomers’ homes, many of whom she called her boyfriends.

Her “boyfriends” were actually competing to make money out of her. She had become a valuable commodity, and by the summer of 2005, was being trafficked as far away as London and Manchester, having sex with scores of strangers in one night. She spent Christmas Day with her abusers, taking ecstasy, coke and alcohol with them to blot out the inevitable rapes. She very quickly learned that was the only way to cope.

“My sister and mum were getting threatened with rape, my brother was getting threatened with kidnap and all sorts of extreme violence. Most of my abuse wasn’t hands on. It was more mental. They used to call me all the names under the sun. And if I did not go back to them, something would happen to my family.”

As the rapes escalated, Wilson started acting out the violence she was experiencing on her family. When she threatened them with a knife, social workers put her in a children’s home — making it easier for her abusers to get to her.

Taxi drivers, some of whom raped her, would hang around while staff looked on. She describes being stopped by police while with her abusers. Officers did nothing. Laughing and shaking hands with them while she, a vulnerable 12 year old, sat drunk in the back.

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When Wilson got to 16 her abusers wanted her to bring young girls to them, as she had been. And on one occasion, she did.

“It was the last occasion. I just couldn’t go through with it because it was like looking at my sister. I could not let them go through what I went through.”

Wilson’s sister, Laura, was never groomed. Her teenage boyfriend, Ashtiaq Ashgar, led a double life common within Rotherham’s traditional Pakistani community. Although he was drinking and had white girlfriends, his strict Muslim parents had planned an arranged marriage for their son.

In October 2010, Laura, 17, confronted Ashgar’s family about their relationship. Days later, Ashgar, also 17, stabbed Laura 40 times, and dumped her body in a canal. He admitted her murder and was jailed for 17 and half years. It was dubbed the UK’s first “white honour killing”.

“The grooming is just minor to me. But my sister’s murder killed me,” Wilson says. A large picture of Laura, pretty, smiling, hangs above the mantelpiece in her living room.

She says she cannot bear to visit her sister’s grave. Instead, she plans to create a shrine to her in the garden. “Then I will never have to leave her,” she says, emotion entering her voice for the first time.

Laura had a daughter, Alesha, whom Wilson cares for alongside her own son. Although a senior case review said Laura’s murder could not have been prevented, she believes the authorities failed her too.

“I don’t believe it’s an honour killing – there is no honour in murder. [Her murderer] is just as bad as the groomers. He thought he was untouchable as well.”

Wilson estimates she has tried to take her life “around a dozen” times. She suffers from post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and panic attacks. Despite attempts to “blank out” the abuse, she has vivid flashbacks and nightmares.

Medication – including diazepam – is helping to “get her through the interviews” to talk about the book, including appearances on Loose Women and BBC Breakfast.

“My groomers were addicted to having power and control over young girls.”

Two of Wilson’s abusers, brothers Razwan and Umar Razaq, were jailed in 2010; just five men have so far been convicted for CSE in Rotherham.

Razwan Razaq was sentenced to for nine years for rape and sexual activity with a child, Umar to four and a half years for sexual activity with a child. He was released in July 2011.

No one has ever been charged with any crime against Wilson. Yet she still sees her abusers on the street. She says one
messaged her to say she “got what she deserved”; she claims another has been in touch from Pakistan, and says many abusers have been able to flee because their passports weren’t seized.

“He messaged me a few days ago – ‘clap clap, clap you made it to the papers too...’”

How does that make her feel? She is suddenly very angry.

“When one of them tried to say hello to me in the street, I flipped out. How the fuck have you got the cheek, you dirty bastard – don’t you look at me, don’t you talk to me. If I see you, put your fucking head down ‘cos if not I’ll put it down for you. I just hate them.”

She is biding her time, slowly working with solicitors to build a case. Writing the book was hard, but nothing compared to the trauma of the trial of her sister’s murderer.

“I know how hard it’s going to be – I don’t want to break. I want to do it when I know I’m ready. They believe they are untouchable. But it will soon come and bite them on the arse. I can’t wait for that day.”

Yet her contempt for those who groomed her does not extend to their race or religion. She credits a local Asian man as being the “father she never had”, one of the only adults able to protect her.

“There’s good and bad in every race. The Koran does not tell you to go out and rape young girls. Islam did not play a part in my abuse at all. My groomers were addicted to having power and control over young girls.”

Her abusers were racist. “They called us white trash.” Why? She sighs. “Because we were easy; because our parents weren’t as strict as theirs. They said we wore miniskirts but I was always in trainers and hoodies. But it wasn’t about what we wore – it was about how vulnerable we were.”

Despite the constant reminders of her ordeal, Wilson refuses to leave Rotherham. She says she can see positives happening. After leading demands for former Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Shaun Wright to resign, she is happy with new appointee Dr Alan Billings, who has created a Victims, Survivors and their Families panel.

“The new PCC is really lovely. He does listen to survivors and families and that’s what needs to happen. Change cannot happen overnight; it’s going to be a long process.

“It’s just a shame that it’s taken all these years. They could have saved so many young girls.”

But she is worried that not enough people like her are coming forward. In the shadowy car parks, barber shops and takeaways where she was raped, the abuse continues.

She says there are a “hell of a lot more” victims than 1,400 – an estimate the Jay report called conservative – and many more perpetrators than 300.

“Victims’ voices are being heard. But some victims won’t come forward because they are scared of a repeat of the past. They don’t want to be failed again like they were before. I was like that. Before I came out about the grooming it was my dirty little secret. But they don’t scare me now, because I’m a woman. I have a voice. And they know they can’t hurt me.”

Violated by Sarah Wilson is published by Harper Element (paperback £7.99, ebook £5.99)